Perceptions of the Self and the Other in the Short Stories of Yūsuf al-Shārūnī

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between identity and narrative. More specifically, it explores how the self and the other are perceived and represented in the short stories of the Egyptian writer Yūsuf al-Shārūnī (b. 1924). Over five chapters, it traces how these perceptions develop, through a chronological study of al-Shārūnī's texts.

The thesis is structured accordingly: its introduction begins with a historical and theoretical overview of the discourse of identity; it then shifts to the domain of literary theory, where it explores the concepts of narrative identity and the narrative self; it then moves to a discussion of al-Shārūnī and his genre, considering the origins, form and nature of the modern Arabic short story and providing biographical data on the author. The introduction concludes with a discussion of the thesis' theoretical and methodological approaches.

Each chapter is placed within a specific time frame and its historical/political context, being: (1) the Second World War and its aftermath; (2) the pre-revolutionary period; (3) the early years of the new regime; (4) Nasser's rule and the shift towards autocracy; and (5) the eras of Sadat and Mubarak. Further, each chapter explores common concepts: the narrative identities of the self and other; key characters and themes; and the relationship between the individual and the collectivity. The overall analysis supports the following hypothesis: that al-Shārūnī's short stories demonstrate an evolutionary view of reality, represented by a dynamic, evolving narrative self and other; and that his texts are underpinned by an evolving ideological discourse, informed by the socio-political context of their production.

The thesis also considers al-Shārūnī's contribution to the Arabic short story. In particular, it reveals how many of his key moods and trends predate those of his successors by more than twenty years, making him an early pioneer of modernist Arabic narrative.

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Preliminary Notes

1. Translations into English are my own, unless indicated otherwise.
2. I use the standard system of transliteration, but omit the final "h" for the *tā' marbūṭa*. In the *iḍāfa* construction, the *tā' marbūṭa* becomes 't'. Diacritical marks are used throughout. The article appears as *al-* and *'l-*, even before *al-ḥurūf al-shamsiyya*. The letters *yā'* and *wāw* are represented either by 'ī' or 'y', and 'ū' or 'w', according to the preceding letter. Final *alif maqṣūra* is marked as 'ā'.
3. Names of Arab authors who publish articles or studies in English are given in the form in which they appear on such texts, and are not transliterated.
4. Conventional English equivalents are used for the names of prominent personalities (e.g. Nasser), countries and large towns; otherwise names are transliterated.
5. British English spelling is used, except in the case of quotations from books published in the United States, where American spelling is used.
6. Italics are used to indicate non-English words, but are occasionally used for emphasis.
7. Most of al-Shārūnī's short stories were published first in literary journals. Due to the unavailability of many older journals, initial references to his stories will be as follows: (i) details of the story's *first publication* (i.e. journal title, place and date); (ii) full bibliographical details of the *first collection* within which the story was reprinted. All subsequent citations will refer to pages in the *first collection*.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother.

Introduction

This thesis examines the relationship between identity and narrative. More specifically, it explores the ways in which the self and the other are perceived and represented in the short stories of the Egyptian writer Yūsuf al-Shārūnī (b. 1924). It also attempts to trace how these perceptions and narrative representations develop, through a chronological study of his most significant texts. In all, this analysis aims to support the following hypothesis: that al-Shārūnī's short stories demonstrate an evolutionary view of reality, represented by a dynamic, evolving narrative self and other; and that his texts are underpinned by an evolving ideological discourse, informed by the socio-political contexts within which they were produced.

My choice of topic for this thesis was inspired some years ago by a reading of the novella *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* (*Umm Hāshim's Lamp*),[1] by the Egyptian writer and critic Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī (1905-93). Its protagonist, Ismā'īl, is a young man born into a traditional Muslim community, who leaves for England to study medicine. Seven years later, he returns to his native Egypt, where he establishes himself as a doctor. As a consequence of his European education and experiences, Ismā'īl is torn by two parallel, yet often contradicting, conflicts. First is the conflict he feels within himself as an individual, articulated by his ambivalence towards a West which, in spite of all it offers in terms of modernity and "progress", remains somehow beyond him. Second is the conflict he feels within his outer, collective self, as he struggles to reconcile his newly-acquired scientific logic with his community's age-old traditions, rituals and values. The narrative concludes with what appears to be a compromise: Ismā'īl's social and spiritual crises are resolved via a re-affirmation of his faith and a re-embracing of

[1] Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* [1944] (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li'l-Kitāb, 1975). Translated into English by M. M. Badawi as *The Saint's Lamp and Other Stories* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973).

his local identity, coupled, we understand, with a continued commitment to the scientific principles of his medical instruction.[2]

Ḥaqqī's sensitive and still highly relevant novella marks an important and relatively early contribution to what has now become a wealth of modern fiction in Arabic exploring the tensions between the cultures of the Arab world and the West.[3] Further, the text is an illuminating example of the very many variables in the relations between the self and the other, and touches perceptively on their essential arenas of difference, be they ideological, intellectual, spiritual, emotional or cultural. Finally, and perhaps most significantly for myself, is the fact that *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* led me in turn to many other texts addressing the Arab-West/self-other dichotomy, as a result of which the project of this thesis was conceived.[4]

While not wishing to lose sight of the literary foundations of this study, the first part of this introduction will be devoted to a brief, but necessary, historical and theoretical overview of the concept of identity. Its necessity lies in the fact that any investigation into identity in narrative will also encroach inevitably onto various other domains and disciplines, among them philosophy, social and developmental psychology, anthropology and structural linguistics. The significance of this interdisciplinary diversity is that it illustrates the sheer breadth and hybridity of the

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[2] In fact, the resolution to the narrative is ambiguous, although Badawi asserts that the general idea of the novella is "an elaboration of Einstein's dictum that science without religion is blind". Ibid., p. xii.

[3] Earlier examples of note include Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī's *Ḥadīth 'Īsā Ibn Hishām aw Fatra min al-Zamān* [*The Story of 'Īsā Ibn Hishām or A Period in Time*] (Cairo, 1898), and Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's *'Uṣfūr min al-Sharq* [*A Bird from the East*] (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'līf wa'l-Tarjama wa'l-Nashr, 1938).

[4] Among the more distinguished examples are al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ's novel *Mawsim al-Hijra ilā al-Shamāl* [*Season of Migration to the North*] (Beirut: Dār al-'Awda, 1967); 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim's *Qadar al-Ghuraf al-Muqbiḍa* [*The Fate of Depressing Rooms*] (Cairo: Maṭbū'āt al-Qāhira, 1982); 'Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf's *Mudun al-Milḥ* [*Cities of Salt*] (Beirut: al-Mu'assasat al-'Arabiyya li'l-Dirāsāt wa'l-Nashr, 1984); and Bahā' Ṭāhir's short story "Bi'l-Ams Ḥalumt Bik" ("Last Night I Dreamt of You"), in the collection *Bi'l-Ams Ḥalumt Bik* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li'l-Kitāb, 1984). Two further novels employ this theme, both of which are by Egyptian authors and are written in English: Waguih Ghali's *Beer in the Snooker Club* [1964] (London: Serpent's Tale, 1987), and Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992).

discourse of identity, a fact which will come to light throughout the course of this analysis.

The first part of this introduction will be given over to those theories and modes of reference employed herein which find their origins beyond the realms of literary theory. As much of the discourse of identity is rooted in philosophy and psychology, the first section will give a brief overview of the historical and scholastic contexts within which identity arises in each of these disciplines. More importantly, it will attempt to provide workable definitions of the terminology most relevant to this research: *identity*, *self* and *other*. The second part of the introduction will cross over to the field of literary theory, and will explore the concepts of *narrative identity* and *the narrative self*, which build on many of the premises discussed in the earlier section. It will then move on to al-Shārūnī and his genre, providing a personal and professional biography for the author and considering the origins, form and nature of the modern Arabic short story. This should go some way towards explaining my reasons for selecting al-Shārūnī and the short story genre for analysis. The final section will discuss my theoretical and methodological approach, and will give a breakdown of the thesis' structure.

Identity: An Introduction

The concept of identity will prove to be the main philosophical, theoretical and critical point of departure for this thesis and its conclusions. As such, I will attempt a rudimentary survey of the (largely philosophical) body of thought relating to this concept, and will define the term and its attendant notions of the *self* and the *other*.

A Historical and Theoretical Overview

Within the Western scholastic tradition at least, theories of identity find their historical origins in the fields of theology and philosophy, and are rooted in an eclectic assimilation of pre-Christian, Greco-Roman, Judaic and Islamic references. Broadly

speaking, pre-Enlightenment philosophical and theological discussions of identity were limited to monotheistic and monistic explanations of "being", and descriptions of the self in terms of its various functions: operational functions, such as speech and action, were seen to be faculties of the *mind*, whereas questions regarding intentionality and responsibility were attributed to the incorporeal yet essentially conscious *soul*.[5] Plato, for example, identified the soul with the rational, decision-making and acting *person* — an incorporeal "substance" occupying a corporeal being.[6] This Platonic explanation of the soul-cum-person is perhaps the earliest identifiable model of the self.

As the post-Reformation era ushered in a period of rapid development in physics and mathematics, scholars such as René Descartes (1596-1650), Baruch Spinoza (1632-77), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) began to apply new methods of "mathematical" reasoning to their philosophical analyses.[7] Philosophy's reinvention as a so-called "natural science" led in turn to a change of focus in the theorising of identity, favouring a mechanistic examination of the body over the (by now interchangeable) mind and soul. This methodology is exemplified in the theory of Cartesian dualism, which rests on the distinction between the mental and the physical. Another Cartesian contribution to the emergent discourse of the self is his coining of the "I", the incorporeal yet essentially reflective substance of his proposition *cogito ergo sum* — "I think, therefore I am." As Descartes asserts, the function of thinking (*cogitatio*) encapsulates not only intellectual but also volitional activities, such as willing and affirming, and the mental dimensions of imagining and perceiving.[8]

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[5] Frank Johnson, "The Western Concept of Self", in Anthony J. Marsella, George DeVos and Francis L. K. Hsu (eds.), *Culture and Self: Asian and Western Perspectives* (New York and London: Tavistock Publications, 1985), p. 98.

[6] "Soul", in Antony Flew (ed.), *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3rd. ed. (London: Pan, 1984), pp. 331-332.

[7] Isaiah Berlin, *The Age of Enlightenment: The Eighteenth Century Philosophers*, 13th. ed. (New York, Ontario and London: Mentor, 1956), pp. 14-15.

[8] "Descartes, René", in Flew, op. cit., pp. 89-92.

From the time of the Enlightenment onwards, philosophical methodology became entrenched in the principles of empiricism, that is, observation and experiment, as only the "measurable" properties of what the senses revealed were deemed worthy of full scholastic examination. It was as a result of the development of epistemology, or the philosophical theory of knowledge, its existence and acquisition, that the concept of *identity* and its antithesis *diversity* were first given substance by John Locke (1632-1704), in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). Locke perceived the "I" to be a substantial centre of conscious experience, and described identity as "the first act of the mind [...] to perceive its ideas; and, so far as it perceives them, to know each what it is, and thereby also to perceive their difference, and that one is not the other".[9] It is this perception of the agreement or disagreement of two ideas which forms the basis of *personal identity*, the theory of which is expounded in David Hume's (1711-76) *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), in which the self is perceived as "a theater of the sequence of impressions and ideas".[10]

From a cultural and artistic perspective, the birth of the romantic movement and the novel of first person sensibility also served to consolidate the thesis of the "I" of reflective consciousness. Scholars, meanwhile, continued to focus on the purely measurable aspects of human reality, thus, as logical positivism and empiricism continued apace, the abstractions of philosophy finally gave way to the methodologies of psychology. In time, the notion of the self as a philosophical-psychological construct came to be overlooked in favour of the monitoring of physical, neurochemical and electrical processes, such as sensation, perception and motor actions,[11] a trend which continued well into the mid-nineteenth century.

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[9] John Locke, "Of Knowledge and Opinion", Book IV of the *Essay*, quoted in Berlin, op. cit., p. 86.
[10] Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, "Introduction" to *The Identities of Persons,* ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1976), p. 11.
[11] Johnson, op. cit., p. 99.

It was through the studies of theorists of human behaviour, such as Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Carl Jung (1875-1961) and William James (1842-1910), that the subjective self re-surfaced at the turn of the twentieth century, becoming a key component of psychoanalytical and phenomenological theory. As a result, a new body of ideas concerning the psychic dimensions of the self was developed, as was much of the vocabulary of psychoanalytic practice and thought. In Freudian parlance, the Cartesian "I" came to be replaced by the conscious mind or *ego*, a locus of perception of the outside world, of the body and of all experiences that shape an individual's identity.[12] In lay terms, *ego* continues to be used to speak of the self of an individual, or simply a person's self-image or morale.

With the advance of radical individualism, perhaps the two most influential (and, in terms of this thesis, relevant) philosophical considerations of the self came from Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80), and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), who spoke, somewhat opaquely, of consciousness as "the quest for its own definition in the face of its non-Being".[13] Philosophy aside, from the 1940s to date, the concept of selfhood has established itself as a main mode of reference in all of the social sciences, notably sociology, psychology and anthropology. More recently, the self and the other have also emerged as important criteria for the conceptualisation and analysis of literary texts, as this thesis sets out to demonstrate.

Defining "Identity", "Self" and "Other"

On attempting a definition of the terms *identity*, *self* and *other*, we should perhaps begin with *identity*, as it is the most complex and enjoys the greatest number of variables in its meanings and applications. Daunting as this may sound, it is less so when one considers that the terms *self* and *other* consist in *identity* to such an extent

[12] "Ego", in Flew, op. cit., p. 102.
[13] Rorty, op. cit., p. 11.

that the three are essentially inisolable. Therefore, to speak of identity is in fact to speak of the self, whereas to speak of the self inherently speaks of an other.

The psychoanalytic critic Norman Holland suggests that, in everyday terms, identity refers simply to an individual's characteristics or personality. This personality, according to the developmental model of the identity theorist Heinz Lichtenstein, is founded on a constant "primary identity", or simple subject, which undergoes an infinite number of transformations throughout an individual's lifetime.[14] In this way, identity is a synchronic concept, drawn from the self and its various biological and emotional experiences, and is founded on a combination of physical, that is spatio-temporal, and psychological criteria.[15] The self, meanwhile, is defined similarly as the "distinct individuality or identity of a person",[16] suggesting that the two terms are essentially interchangeable in use. As a distinct individual *that knows itself to be*, the self is perceived as a thinking, internal subject, with the capacity to reconstruct its identity empirically. The self is also viewed by some as a kind of "personal essence, the underlying metaphysical being sustaining our awareness, experience and dignity".[17] Meanwhile, deconstructionists and post-structuralists consider the self to be an allusion, or a contingent construct, arguing that we have different selves to handle different emotions and desires. In this way, the self cannot be irreducible, and is inherently incoherent.

Distinctions will be made in this thesis between two key concepts — that of the inner and outer self, and that of the individual and the collective self — in the hope that these will prove useful in our analysis of al-Shārūnī's short stories. First, since most

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[14] Norman Holland, "Unity, Identity, Text, Self", in Jane P. Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, 2nd. ed. (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 120.

[15] Ibid., p. 122.

[16] "Self", in Patrick Hanks (ed.), *Collins Concise Dictionary*, (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1989), p. 1177.

theorists perceive the self as a phenomenological object, they distinguish between phenomena relating to the inner self, and those relating to the outer.[18] The realm of the inner self is that of internal perspective, functioning apart from the external social reality, and speaking of a level of personal consciousness given to introspection, fantasy, reverie, prayer, problem-solving and decision-making. Hence the inner self is the subject-of-experience, the decider and agent, the knower or interpreter, while its domain is that of rationale, will, creativity and spontaneity.[19] Conversely, phenomena relating to the outer self include externally-located experiences, causality and conditioning, as in "acquired identifications", which are socially- and culturally-determined values, rituals, symbols and practices. It is from these identifications that social groups are defined, and the identities of categories such as gender or class, or social systems such as national or religious groups, are constructed.

Second, the self assumes both personal (or individual) and communal (or collective) dimensions. According to Paul Ricœur, there are two major meanings or "poles" of identity, which are drawn from one's understanding of the word *identical.* These definitions are rooted in the Latin words *ipse* (self) and *idem* (same), whereby "selfhood" translates as *ipse-* (or individual) identity, and "sameness" translates as *idem-* (or collective) identity.[20] Collective identity is shaped in much the same manner as individual identity (that is, through the temporal dimension of human existence), however greater emphasis is given to the role of acquired identifications. Acknowledgement of and adherence to acquired identifications is, in itself, an assertion of sameness, for they infer a powerfully symbolic, collective sense of "unity", be it real or imagined. Further, it is through these acquired identifications that both the

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[17] William L. Benzon, "The Evolution of Narrative and the Self", *Journal of Social and Evolutionary Systems*, 16 (2), 1993, p. 129.

[18] Johnson, op. cit., p. 96. The psychoanalytic theories of Freud, for example, attempt a complex structuralisation of the so-called inner self.

[19] Rorty, op. cit., p. 12.

[20] Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Other*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 2-3.

individual and the collective self may be recognised, by those within and without a particular category, community or culture.

When it comes to the individual's survival and development, consciousness of its collective identity is as essential as consciousness of its personal identity. Yet collective identity is fundamentally moral, and requires the individual to fulfil a social role, as a unit of intentional, responsible agency.[21] The acquired identifications of collective identity supply the individual with an array of accepted or constant traits — such as moral intuitions, ideologies and even standards of "taste" — by which its actions and behaviour are assessed and gauged. Individuals who conform are met with rewards, while those who are "different" may be punished or even ostracised.[22]

Having focused thus far on identity and the self, where, meanwhile, may we locate "the other"? In simple terms, the other is merely that which is beyond, distinct or simply "different" to the self, from either an individual or collective perspective. In the view of semioticians, the self only acquires meaning within a system of such differences, while the other is a *product* of the self-uttering *cogito*.[23] This assertion of selfhood, or *ipse*-identity, consists in a self-other dialectic, articulated through what is called a "discourse of difference", that is, it simultaneously brings into play all that is synonymous with or antithetical to the self. Ricœur even argues that the self-other dialectic marks the point at which the poles of *ipse*- and *idem*-identity meet, since "the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other".[24] Commonly, that "difference" which is seen to define the other bears negative connotations, and is often a means of consolidating the identity of a group. In this way, the group projects its

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[21] Rorty, op. cit., p. 4.
[22] Ibid., pp. 4-5.
[23] Raman Selden, *Practising Theory and Reading Literature: An Introduction* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 75.
[24] Ricœur, op. cit., p. 3.

negative fears or feelings onto its image of the other, making it the devalued half in a binary opposition.

The other is also a prominent term in the theories of the French psychologist Jacques Lacan (1901-81), who revisits and rewrites much of Freud's body of thought. Lacan speaks of two types of other, the "specular" and "the symbolic", both of which relate to the mechanisms of identification. Lacan locates the beginnings of identity in the moment when the infant first identifies with its mirror image, thereby perceiving itself as whole.[25] The self is thus constituted by its so-called specular other, or the image of what he or she *wants to be*, as reflected in a mirror, a parent, and so on. Yet Lacan argues that this image also alienates the self, since identification can only ever be partial. Thus, he claims that individuals spend their lives trying to attain a sense of psychic wholeness or integration, and that selves never become what they are "supposed", or want, to be. The "symbolic" Other, meanwhile, (which Lacan always capitalises), is perceived as an alien Other which structures the self's subjectivity. Lacan argues that "to be" is fundamentally "to speak", and that to speak is to use a system of representations that precedes us. In this way, our inner thought processes are shaped by language, and inasmuch as we are speaking selves, we are also "spoken" or "inscribed". Therefore, our consciousness is created externally, by linguistic structures loaded with social imperatives, such as rules, laws and social definitions, such as "mother", "child" and so on.[26]

The Narrating Self and the Narrative Self

The individual is a self-narrating subject. Due to the temporality of human existence, the individual is entrenched in the ongoing process of history, the experience of which it seeks constantly to translate, revise and update. Thus, the self might be described as the protagonist of its own individual history or "drama", while its prenarrative

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[25] A concept derived from Freud's theory of the "mirror stage".

experience is rendered as narrative in the form of thought processes, oral transmission, or in the concrete structure of any narrative genre.[27] Since the act of self-narration is both innate and inherently interpretative (that is, both receptive and creative),[28] we may see why narratives — literary texts in particular — are one of the best ways of expressing our understanding of the world, and of articulating each changing stage of the "I". As such, narratives also help us to construct coherent selves. As Ricœur argues:

> In contrast to the tradition of the *cogito* and to the pretension of the subject to know itself by immediate intuition, it must be said that we understand ourselves only by the long detour of the signs of humanity deposited in cultural works. What would we know of love and hate, of moral feelings and, in general, of all that we call the *self*, if these had not been brought to language and articulated by literature?[29]

Besides the *narrating* (that is, the personal) self, this thesis is concerned equally with the *narrative* self, being a self that is constructed *in* or *by* the discourse of a narrative genre, such as the short story. As with personal identity, narrative identity is constructed around an ongoing dialectic of selfhood and sameness, and, just as Holland defines identity as a person's "character" or "personality", Ricœur and Anthony Kerby define a narrative self as any character, or subject, in a text. Further, just as Holland describes an individual as living out his or her "variations on an identity theme",[30] the narrative self or character functions similarly, but on the level of narrative emplotment. Thus the narrative self is dynamically constructed and

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[26] Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1984), p. 108.

[27] See Anthony Paul Kerby, *Narrative and the Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). Kerby refers to the "prenarrative" level of experience as "the quasi-narrative structure [...] of experience, where the prefix should be taken to imply not the complete absence of narrative, as though it were prior to all narrative structure, but rather an earlier (and in a sense more primitive) stage of narrative structuration", p. 8.

[28] As Holland states, "*interpretation is a function of identity*", and "*interpretation re-creates identity*", op. cit., pp. 123 and 131.

[29] Paul Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. trans. introd. John B. Thompson, 5th. ed. (London: C.U.P., 1984), p. 143.

[30] Holland, op. cit., p. 120.

reconstructed, transforming and adapting in response to a text's events, turning points, crises and trials.

As with the narrating/personal self, the narrative self engages with and responds to its experiences, or rather the succession of events that are recounted in its "story". As such, it is the narrative which "constructs the identity of the character [...] in constructing that of the story told".[31] This argument, which holds that it is the identity of the story which forms the identity of the character, is in line with the formalist and structuralist assertion that characters in narrative are the "products" of emplotment.[32] Others argue, however, that the process is reciprocal, while Rorty suggests that it is the "dispositional characteristics" of characters, or narrative selves, that permit a narrative to develop, in that "their natures form their responses to experiences, rather than being formed by them".[33] Clearly, the question of whether identity is something given or constructed, is as relevant to the field of literary studies as to any of the other disciplines mentioned herein.

Scholars also argue, however, that there are specific, if subtle, differences between narrating/personal and narrative selves. Kerby, for example, claims that the narrative self is distinct from the personal self because it arises solely out of signifying practices, rather than existing prior to them as an autonomous or Cartesian agent.[34] As such, the narrative self is a *purely* social and linguistic construct, or nexus of meaning. Others point to the fact that the criteria for identifying, and re-identifying, the narrative self differ from those for identifying the individual. In Rorty's view, less emphasis is given in the world of the narrative self to individuation in criteria of identification, since she sees characters as being composed from reproducible narrative

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[31] Ricœur, op. cit., pp. 147-148.

[32] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 111.

[33] Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, "A Literary Postscript: Characters, Persons, Selves, Individuals", in *The Identities of Persons*, op. cit., p. 304.

[34] Kerby, op. cit., p. 1.

configurations and elements.[35] In this way, she claims that narrative selves are identified according to the predetermined criteria of categories, or character "types", deducing from this that it is the "predictable constitutions and temperaments"[36] of characters which determine how they proceed on the level of emplotment. It should be mentioned, however, that this argument appears to be somewhat skewed towards the Greek genre of "character", that is, of reproducible literary archetypes of human behaviour, or towards the structuralist assumptions of theorists such as A. J. Greimas, whose narrative scheme reduces characters to six identifiable *actants*.[37]

Some scholars also argue that the narrative self, which is by nature more defined and delineated within the confines of its genre or discourse, has less dimensions and is less unified than the personal self. Rorty even asserts that narrative selves are, unlike their personal equivalents, *incapable* of undergoing crises of identity, despite their equal susceptibility to conflicts and trying circumstances. Her argument follows that, in instances of crisis within a text, what results is merely "disharmony" among the dispositional traits that make up the narrative self, adding that "because characters are defined by their characteristics rather than by the ultimate principles that guide their choices, form their souls, they need not in normal circumstances force or even face the question of which of their dispositions is dominant."[38]

Author and Genre

There are many justifications for my choice of author here: al-Shārūnī is a leading proponent and practitioner of the modern Arabic short story, and is arguably one of Egypt's most influential living writers, having forged his literary career and reputation almost exclusively through the short story genre. Yet, while his collections have been

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[35] Rorty, op. cit., p. 304.
[36] Ibid. p. 304.
[37] Being: *sender* → *object* → *receiver / helper* → *subject* → *opponent.* Greimas's actantial model is first elaborated in his *Sémantique structurale* (Paris: Larousse, 1966).
[38] Rorty. op. cit., p. 305.

reprinted and reformatted many times, and appear to be generally well-read,[39] there is little in Arabic and even less in English which discusses his particular contribution to the Arabic short story. In fact, he appears to have been excluded to a great extent from the modern Arabic literary "canon", if such a canon may be claimed to exist.

It may be argued that this phenomenon goes back to the earliest stage in al-Shārūnī's career, when he was overshadowed by the success of his compatriot Yūsuf Idrīs (1927-91), who published his first short story collection *Arkhaṣ Layālī* (*The Cheapest Nights*)[40] in the same year, and as part of the same series, as al-Shārūnī's first collection *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa* (*The Five Lovers*).[41] Perhaps on account of its more avant-garde signature, al-Shārūnī's collection failed to receive much of the attention that Idrīs's work enjoyed, although it won praise from fellow writers, such as Fatḥī Ghānīm (1924-99) and Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī. Idrīs also went on to become a much more prolific and public-oriented writer, while al-Shārūnī's fictional output remained modest (he would often write no stories for many years at a time), and he tended to steer clear of the national media circus. As such, he is more of a "writer's writer" than a well-known and widely-read literary personality, although it is hoped that this study will bring his often-overlooked contribution to the modern Arabic short story to light. Indeed, the thesis will reveal how many of al-Shārūnī's key moods and trends predate those of his successors by up to twenty years, making him a true pioneer of modernist narrative in Arabic.

Equally, there are numerous justifications for my choice of genre. In spite of the peripheral position of the short story in the West, it has, since the Second World War at least, enjoyed the status of being the most popular literary genre in the Arab world,

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[39] His first collection was reprinted for the third time in 1995, over forty years after its first publication.

[40] Al-Kitāb al-Dhahabī (Cairo: Rūz al-Yūsuf, 1954).

[41] Al-Kitāb al-Dhahabī (Cairo: Rūz al-Yūsuf, 1954).

transcending the tastes and literary sensibilities of all social strata.[42] Yet, despite a highly-discriminating reading public, large-scale output and a long tradition of innovation and experimentation in the genre, there has been a dearth of critical material focusing explicitly on the Arabic short story (again, particularly in the English language), with the result that it has taken a poor second place to the novel and, to a less extent, drama. Again, it is hoped that this thesis will go some small way towards righting these aspects of the short story's predicament.

What follows will attempt a concise introduction to the modern Arabic short story, locating its historical origins and giving a condensed overview of its development. Certain aspects of its form and nature will also be considered, inasmuch as limitations of space permit. It is not my intention to attempt an expansive, socio-political or cultural analysis of the emergence and development of the modern Arabic short story; those seeking a more comprehensive source should consult Sabry Hafez's *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature*,[43] which gives particular emphasis to the genre. I will then turn briefly to al-Shārūnī and his career, and to the significant, though often unrecognised, contribution he has made to the modern short story in Arabic.

A Brief History of the Modern Arabic Short Story

To date, scholars have tended to take two approaches when considering the history of the modern Arabic short story. The critical objective behind both of these approaches has been to locate sources for the short story in its modern form, be they indigenous or "imported". First is the attempt to root the genre in the classical Arabic literary heritage,

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[42] As Sabry Hafez writes: "In the Arab world [...] as in other developing and semi-developed countries such as India, South Africa and Yugoslavia, for various reasons the short story has emerged as the most popular and arguably the most significant literary medium." "The Modern Arabic Short Story", in *The Cambridge History of Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. M. M. Badawi (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1992), p. 270. This supports the view of Ian Reid, who writes that the short story is "probably the most widely read of all genres" world-wide. In *The Short Story*, The Critical Idiom Series no. 37 (London: Routledge, 1977), p. 1.

[43] (London: Saqi Books, 1993).

which contains many examples of short narrative in a variety of forms, among them the fully narrative *sūra* of *Yūsuf* in the Qur'ān; the *maqāma* form;[44] the *ḥikāya* (tale); the anecdotes of al-Jāḥiẓ (c. 776/7-868/9) in the *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'* (*The Book of Misers*); the *cante-fable* of Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī's (897-c.972) *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (*The Book of Songs*); the historical romance of 'Antar and the definitive example of *Alf Layla wa Layla (The Thousand and One Nights)*.[45] Western scholars, meanwhile, have tended to focus on the influence of Russo-European and North American writers, whose short stories were first developed from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Among those commonly cited are Nikolai Gogol (1809-52); Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-81); Guy de Maupassant (1850-93); Ivan Turgenev (1818-83); Anton Chekhov (1860-1904); Gustave Flaubert (1821-80); and Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49), the latter of whom is widely designated as the originator of the modern short story.

As Hafez argues, however, neither comparison with the Western model, nor the sifting through of pre-existing forms of indigenous short prose, give sufficient recognition to the fact that the modern Arabic short story is essentially a hybrid product, of its own unique socio-political and historical making. Since the onset of the *nahḍa*, or cultural renaissance, which began at the start of the nineteenth century in Egypt and the centres of the Levant, both the genre and its readers have developed and transformed. This has occurred via the interrelated processes of Western colonisation and associated cultural and intellectual exchange; the proliferation of state-run education; the spread of the media and particularly of the press; and the waves of migration from rural regions to urban centres.

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[44] Translated into English as "session" and French as "scéance", the *maqāma* is a short narrative genre, usually containing adventures of beggars or rogues, rendered in ornamental rhymed prose.

[45] Mahmoud Manzalaoui, ed. introd, *Writing Today: The Short Story* (Cairo: The American Research Centre in Egypt, 1968), p. 17.

By the mid-nineteenth century, many old *maqāmāt* had begun to be reprinted, encouraging writers to produce new forms of the genre, but dealing with contemporary issues and themes. At the same time, a great deal of Western prose fiction (written in English, French and Russian in particular), had already been translated into Arabic, a process undertaken by a newly-emergent Egyptian and Levantine elite that had been grounded in European education systems, either abroad or in regional confessionary schools. It was the members of this elite who, in the face of the continued colonial presence, began to look towards the potentialities of fiction as a mode by which to articulate their transforming, and increasingly dissatisfactory, realities. There thus followed a rapid flowering of original, indigenous narrative forms which, alongside their translated cousins, began to appear in the ever-proliferating Arabic-language newspapers and magazines.

In this way, we may see that there is a difference of around only two or three generations between the nascence of the Western modern short story and what we may loosely describe as its Arabic-language "equivalent". The motivation behind the emergence of the latter, however, was by no means purely an exercise in emulation; rather, it was the expression of a regional cultural revival, engineered by a newly-politicised, erudite local elite. As Hafez explains: "The emergence of a new literary genre is part of a lengthy and intricate process that changes people's understanding of their society and their perceptions of themselves before changing the discourses that process their experience."[46] Thus this newly-empowered elite, with access to the press and high administerial positions, began to introduce innovations into Arabic fiction that were as much experiments with narrative form as an articulation of their heightened self-awareness. This is particularly noticeable in their musings on notions such as "national identity", and their analyses of their experience, status and rights as citizens under colonial rule. Unsurprisingly, much of the experimentation with short narratives

[46] Hafez, op. cit., p. 271.

at this time expressed itself in the form of essays or tracts, often with strongly polemical or didactic dimensions.

The Egyptian scholar Abdel-Aziz Abdel-Meguid describes the initial, "embryonic stage"[47] of the modern Arabic short story as being from 1870 to around 1914, marked by the publication of Salīm al-Busṭānī's (1846-84) "Ramya min Ghayr Rāmin" ("The Shot that Nobody Fired"), in the magazine *al-Jinān* in 1870. Al-Busṭānī, who translated fiction for publication alongside his journalist father Buṭrus (1819-83), continued to experiment with short prose narratives, and is favoured by some scholars as one of the most prominent pioneers of the modern Arabic short story. However, al-Busṭānī's credentials as a pioneer of the genre may be put into a more realistic perspective when we consider his work and its overall impact. It is true that while he, along with a number of his Levantine colleagues, broke new ground in the field of short fictional prose and tackled themes of contemporary socio-political and cultural significance, his language and style were directed towards, and hence effectively limited to, his peers within the elite.

By contrast, Hafez nominates the Egyptian essayist and self-made intellectual 'Abd Allāh al-Nadīm (1843/4-96) as "the most outstanding pioneer of the short fictional form in embryo".[48] A participant in the 'Urābī rebellion, and a trained journalist and distinguished orator, al-Nadīm's fictional narratives, which he published in his magazine *al-Tankīt wa'l-Tabkīt,* tapped into the tastes and everyday social concerns of the new, as opposed to the traditional, reading public. In doing so, he created a simpler literary language,[49] touched on topics that were meaningful to the ordinary reader,[50] and succeeded in articulating the new social reality without "reverting" to the

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[47] Abdel-Aziz Abdel-Meguid, *The Modern Arabic Short Story: Its Emergence, Development and Form* (Cairo: al-Maaref Press, 1955), p. 77.

[48] Hafez, op. cit., p. 272.

[49] In particular, he experimented with the use of colloquial in dialogue.

[50] Such as the impact of Western culture on society, the role of women and the exploitation of the peasantry.

maqāma form or merely emulating foreign genres. What is perhaps most significant about al-Nadīm's mode of writing is its forging of a link between this nascent literary genre and issues of national, cultural and religious identity.[51]

Abdel-Meguid's second, or "trial", stage (1914-1925)[52] of the modern Arabic short story is dominated by the person of Muḥammad Taymūr (1892-21), who is more commonly designated than al-Busṭānī as the creator or "originator" of the genre.[53] While short stories at this time were generally technically immature, two texts are cited as "points of departure"[54] for the genre: "Sanatuhā al-Jadīda" ("Her New Year"), by the Lebanese writer Mīkhā'īl Nu'ayma (1889-1989), originally published in 1914,[55] and "Fi'l-Qiṭār" ("On the Train"), by Muḥammad Taymūr, originally published in 1917.[56] Abdel-Meguid's third, or "formation", stage (from 1925 onwards),[57] opens with Muḥammad Taymūr's brother Maḥmūd (1894-1973), whom Badawi claims is "regarded as chiefly responsible for the development and popularisation of the genre".[58] His collection *al-Shaykh Jum'a wa Qiṣaṣ Ukhrā* (*Shaykh Jum'a and Other Stories*),[59] which features particularly Egyptian (rural and urban) characters and discusses local social realities and problems, is seen as one of the earliest attempts at a specifically Egyptian national literature.

According to Hafez, the finest example of a mature and artistically coherent form of short fictional prose in Arabic emerged in 1929, with the publication of "Ḥadīth al-

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[51] Hafez, op. cit., p. 273.
[52] Abdel-Meguid, op. cit., p. 102.
[53] Ibid., p. 103.
[54] Hartmut Fähndrich, "Fathers and Husbands: Tyrants and Victims in some Autobiographical and Semi-Autobiographical Works from the Arab World", in *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature,* ed. Roger Allen, Hilary Kilpatrick and Ed de Moor (London: Saqi Books, 1995), p. 107.
[55] Reprinted in the collection *Kān mā Kān* [It Has Happened] (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1937).
[56] Reprinted in the collection *Mā Tarāh al-'Uyūn* [*What the Eyes Can See*] (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-I'timād, 1922).
[57] Abdel-Meguid, op. cit., p. 109.
[58] M. M. Badawi, *A Short History of Modern Arabic Literature* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1993), p. 234.
[59] (Cairo, 1925).

Qarya" ("Village Talk") by Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Lāshīn (1894-1954), of *Jamā'at al-Madrasa al-Ḥadītha*, or "The Modern School" group.[60] With the short story now established as a genre in its own right, the decades that followed ushered in a series of writers' movements and schools, as a result of which the form pursued a series of different directions, among them romanticism, realism and modernism. What endured, however, was the connection between the short narrative form as a mode of expressing individual and collective experience, and the socio-political backdrop that continued to shape its evolution. Thus a number of socio-political themes were dominant throughout its emergence and development: colonialism and anti-colonialist discourse; factionalism among local pro-independence movements; economic crises; the Second World War and the colonialist withdrawal; and the creation of the state of Israel and the ensuing wars and displacement of the Palestinians. In the Egyptian context, perhaps one of the most significant historical points of reference is the Egyptian revolution of 1952, and its attendant ideologies of pan-Arabism and populism. This pronouncement of political and national independence paved the way for a socialist-realist trend which soon shaped much of the narrative fiction in the region.

The Form and Nature of the Short Story

While there are pitfalls in attempting to define the short story, especially within a cross-cultural context, certain features emerge as characteristic of the genre: a concentration on a limited number of characters or sometimes only one single character; an often uncomplicated plot, usually deriving from an isolated incident or event; a time-span simultaneously capturing a sense of past, present and future; swift *dénouement*; and economical, dense writing.[61] Some scholars argue that the modern short story is fundamentally indefinable, its beauty lying merely in an inherently organic quality, from which stem its infinite potentialities for form. To take Claude Brémond's premise

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[60] The group, which also included Muḥammad and Maḥmūd Taymūr and Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, was organised around the periodical *al-Fajr* (1925-1927).

[61] "Short Story", in Martin Gray, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 2nd. ed. (Beirut and Essex: York and Longman, 1992).

that the modern short story consists in what he describes as "une séquence élémentaire",[62] or a requisite three-phase group of events, the modern short story may not be confined within one particular narrative pattern. Indeed, there are no fixed structures, actions or themes in the short story, and as a genre it is essentially protean in nature.[63]

Nor can the genre be definitively defined as "short"; indeed, the requisite length of the modern short story is a divisive point among many literary theorists. Ian Reid, for example, argues against a generic definition of the short story in any sense, and states that the term may be applied to "almost any kind of fictitious prose narrative briefer than a novel", encapsulating therein a text of only a page or two, Poe's definition of the "tale" (being that which is "capable of being perused at one sitting"), and Henry James' text of "between six and eight thousand words".[64] Similarly, Frank O'Connor asserts that the term "short story" is basically a misnomer, arguing that "the form of the *novel* is given by the length; in the short story the length is given by the *form*",[65] (emphases added).

Further, there is little to support the misconception that, while generally shorter than the novel, the short story is a "simpler" or more "manageable" form of narrative. O'Connor, for one, cites the short story as a "more artistic" genre than the novel, arguing that its success depends on the writer's ability to provide the exact amount of information (in terms of the story's exposition, development and dramatic elements), for the reader's "moral imagination" to function.[66] Nor should the short story's inherent dynamism be overlooked; it may be argued that the modern Arabic short story has witnessed the most rapid development of all the genres, and the most intense

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[62] In Reid, op. cit., p. 6.
[63] Ibid., p. 3.
[64] Ibid., p. 9.
[65] Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (London: Macmillan, 1963), p. 27.
[66] Ibid., pp. 25-26.

exposure to experimentation and innovation. As a result, the modern Arabic short story has attained a marked level of maturity, and its writers have long employed a range of highly sophisticated devices and techniques.

Aḥmad 'Aṭiyya notes that, in the Arab world, the short story is *the* literary genre most capable of articulating social change. This, he claims, gives it "mass" appeal, a fact also enhanced by its brevity, which guarantees it a broad and speedy reception.[67] As such, he argues that the short story form is "the most sensitive and responsive to people's pains and aspirations, and is thus closer and more faithful to the picture of life as it is lived".[68] Yet, despite this "mass" appeal, the short story is also a characteristically "individualistic" form, and is described by O'Connor as possessing an "intense awareness of human loneliness", as exemplified in the dramas of "submerged population groups", such as tramps, intellectuals, dreamers and "outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society".[69] Similarly, Bernard Bergonzi speaks of an "insidiously reductive effect" within the form, which is "disposed to filter down experience to the prime elements of defeat and alienation".[70] 'Aṭiyya adds, meanwhile, that, since Turgenev's celebrated quote: "We have all come out from under Gogol's 'Overcoat'", the short story has also come to exemplify the concerns of the "little man" (*al-rajul al-ṣaghīr*).[71] It is within the context of the individualistic nature of the short story that we may see it as an essentially *modern* form of narrative, and why it has emerged as a popular vehicle for the articulation of existential, and hence identity, issues.

Yūsuf al-Shārūnī and the Arabic Short Story

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[67] Aḥmad Muḥammad 'Aṭiyya, *Fann al-Rajul al-Ṣaghīr fi'l-Qiṣṣa al-'Arabiyya al-Qaṣīra* [*The Art of the 'Little Man' in the Arabic Short Story*], (Damascus: Manshūrāt Ittiḥād al-Kuttāb al-'Arab, 1977), p. 5.
[68] Ibid., p. 5.
[69] O'Connor, op. cit., pp. 18-20.
[70] Quoted in Reid, op. cit., p. 2.
[71] 'Aṭiyya, op. cit., p. 7.

It is shortly after the Second World War that we first locate al-Shārūnī on Egypt's literary scene. Remarkably, even at this early juncture, there was a distinctively avant-garde slant to his writing, marking him — alongside his compatriot Idwār al-Kharrāṭ (b. 1926), the Iraqi Fu'ād al-Takarlī (b. 1927), and the Syrian Zakariyya Tāmir (b. 1931) — as one of the "pioneers" of modernist Arabic literature during the 1950s and 1960s.[72] Al-Shārūnī was born on the 14th of October 1924, in Munūf, a small town in the Munūfiyya province in the Nile Delta. His father was a Protestant clergyman; both he and al-Shārūnī's mother came originally from villages in the Upper Egyptian province of al-Minyā. His family first converted to Protestantism during the time of his grandfather, a small landowner and trader from the village of Shārūna.[73] At the age of three, al-Shārūnī and his family left Munūf and settled in Cairo; al-Shārūnī maintains that he is a Cairene first and foremost, and that his birth-place played no part in his formation or development.[74] As a school-boy, he distinguished himself in the study of Arabic language and literature, and began his first experimental compositions in rhymed prose. Later, as a student in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Cairo (then known as *Jāmi'at Fu'ād al-Awwal*), some of his writings were published in the faculty magazine, most of it poetry heavily influenced by the Mahjar Group.[75]

While studying for a degree in psychology and philosophy, al-Shārūnī read avidly and was involved with a number of student literary circles. He claims to have been attracted to the philosophical writings of Spinoza and Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55); the works of Sartre and Albert Camus (1913-60); what he describes as "the intellectual

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[72] Hafez, "The Modern Arabic Short Story", p. 318.

[73] There is little information available about Egypt's tiny Protestant community. Statistics from 1970 indicate that Egypt's Protestants formed just 0.2 per cent (estimated) of the national population. See E. J. Chitham, *The Coptic Community in Egypt: Spatial and Social Change* (Durham: Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Durham, 1986), p. 1. For this reason, al-Shārūnī will be defined here by the generic term "Copt", which is used in Egypt to signify an Egyptian-born, rather than a foreign-born, Christian.

[74] Yūsuf al-Shārūnī, letter to the author, 9 July 1996.

[75] "Yūsuf al-Shārūnī: Aḥsastu bi-Khayba Ba'd al-Arba'īn" ("Yūsuf al-Shārūnī: Disappointed after the Age of Forty"), interview by 'Abbās Bayḍūn, *Mulḥaq al-Nahār*, Beirut, 22 May 1993, p. 16. In this

heroism" of Ṭaha Ḥusayn (1889-1973); the poems and essays of 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād (1889-1964); and the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). He also chose to indulge his predilection for short narratives, from Dostoyevsky to Gogol; Maupassant to Chekhov; the fables of *Kalīla wa Dimna* to al-Jāḥiz.[76] It was during his years at university that al-Shārūnī became associated with a group of young scholars whom he has nominated as "the experimental school" of that era.[77] Among this "school" were various members of the group that established the ground-breaking magazine *al-Bashīr* in 1948, through which al-Shārūnī and his colleagues explored instilling Arabic prose with modernist and *avant-garde* elements.

An interest in the surrealist movement also drew the young al-Shārūnī towards *Jamā'at al-Fann wa'l-Ḥurriya* (*The Art and Freedom Group*), whose organ *al-Taṭawwur* was a platform for other advocates of modernism. While he never became a member of the group *per se*, al-Shārūnī claims: "[It] alerted me to the possibility of rebelling against the traditional rules, and going beyond the set limits agreed on in literary writing. This also encouraged me to depart from the literary norm of 'story-telling', as represented at that time by the stories of Muḥammad and Maḥmūd Taymūr."[78] Al-Shārūnī also explains how, during his formative years, he sought to remain politically and artistically autonomous as a writer, arguing: "I have always desired to be independent, and have always been wary of becoming a member of any group, for doing so makes you responsible for others' decisions."[79]

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interview, al-Shārūnī explains that the Mahjar Group were very popular at this time, and cites Mīkhā'īl Nu'ayma and Iliyā Abū Māḍī (1889-1957) as influences. Ibid., p. 16.

[76] Ibid., p. 16. Al-Shārūnī also claims: "[Chekhov's] remark that 'the short story is a story with its introduction omitted', delighted and possibly influenced me." Ibid., p. 16.

[77] Yūsuf al-Shārūnī, personal interview, 1 April 1996. Similarly, Ghālī Shukrī cites al-Shārūnī as being part of an "experimental trend" that appeared in Egypt in the late Forties. See his *Ṣirā' al-Ajyāl fi'l-Adab al-Mu'āṣir* [*The Conflict of Generations in Contemporary Literature*], Silsilat Iqra' (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1971), pp. 134-135.

[78] Bayḍūn, op. cit., p. 16.

[79] Ibid., p. 16.

After graduating, al-Shārūnī taught French for eleven years, in Egypt and then the Sudan. In 1956, he made his first attempts at "irrational" or "absurdist" literature, setting up an irrationalist movement with other writers in Cairo. As he claims: "We broke all the rules. At that time our approach was not really appreciated."[80] In the same year, al-Shārūnī took a post at the Supreme Council for the Arts, Literature and Social Sciences in Cairo, of which he later became deputy-director.[81] In 1983, he was offered a position with the Ministry of Information in Muscat, Oman, where he worked for over ten years. Now retired, he lives in al-Ma'ādī, a suburb of Cairo, from where he continues to publish articles on literary criticism and writes occasionally for the Egyptian press. After more than fifty years' dedication to the short story, his next major project — he claims — will be a novel.[82]

In his early years as a writer, al-Shārūnī published most of his short stories in the Lebanese review *al-Adīb,* after which his fictional output has remained modest. His repertoire consists of four short-story collections: *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*; *Risāla ilā Imra'a* (*A Letter to a Woman*);[83] *al-Ziḥām* (*The Crowd*);[84] and *al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh* (*The Mother and the Beast*).[85] Besides these, he has written and edited over thirty books, among them criticism, anthologies and other literary studies, a collection of rhymed prose and three plays translated from English. In spite of being a less than prolific short story writer, al-Shārūnī's narratives have had a significant influence on

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[80] Cited in *L'Observateur arabe* (Cairo, 17 June 1963), p. 44.

[81] Sabry Hafez and Catherine Cobham, eds., *A Reader of Modern Arabic Short Stories* (London: Saqi Books, 1988), p. 45.

[82] Yūsuf al-Shārūnī, personal interview, 12 September 1998.

[83] Al-Kitāb al-Dhahabī (Cairo: Rūz al-Yūsuf, 1960).

[84] (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1969).

[85] (Cairo: Dār Mājid li'l-Ṭibā'a, 1982). Six reformatted collections of his stories have also been published: *Ḥalāwat al-Rūḥ* [*Clinging to Life*], Kitāb al-Yawm (Cairo: Dār Akhbār al-Yawm, 1971); *Muṭāradat Muntaṣaf al-Layl* [*A Midnight Pursuit*], Silsilat Iqra' (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1973); *Ākhir al-'Unqūd* [*The Last of the Bunch*], Kitāb al-Yawm (Dār Akhbār al-Yawm, 1974); *al-Karāsī al-Mūsīqiyya* [*Musical Chairs*] (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li'l-Kitāb, 1990); *al-Ḍaḥk Ḥatā al-Bukā'* [*From Laughter to Tears*] (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-'Āmma li-Quṣūr al-Thaqāfa, 1997); and the anthology *al-Majmū'āt al-Qiṣaṣiyya al-Kāmila* [*The Complete Short Stories*], 2 vols. (Cairo:

later practitioners of the genre, particularly the modernists of the 1960s.[86] Throughout his career he has been awarded a number of awards for his short stories, among them the state-sponsored "Encouragement Prize" in 1969.

Thus far, specific attention has been given to the relationship between the emergence and development of short narratives in Arabic and the transforming socio-political and cultural milieu. In view of this, al-Shārūnī's short stories hold particular interest in that, from the date of his first collection to the present, they document over fifty years' history of modern Egypt. Thus, in his earlier texts, we find the first glimpses of a pre-revolutionary Egypt, emerging from the Second World War and its aftermath, and forging its new social, political and intellectual identity. In the same way, his later texts continue to address and re-assess the transforming realities of the Egyptian nation-state, particularly within the contexts of massive demographic growth, urban migration, the development of new political systems and ideologies, the emergence of new elites, and the many wars and upheavals which have marked this period.

For much of his career, al-Shārūnī's short stories have remained distinct from those of his contemporaries, in terms of their style and often their themes. His style is particular in that it successfully resists most attempts at categorisation, consisting in a heterogeneous composite of expressionistic, impressionistic, realistic and symbolic elements. Perhaps the one defining characteristic of his narrative is the way in which it addresses both the private and public dilemmas of the modern Egyptian citizen, making it particularly suited to an exploration of themes of individual and collective identity. Without doubt, al-Shārūnī's grounding in the fields of philosophy and psychology

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al-Hay'a al-Maṣriyya al-'Āmma li'l-Kitāb, 1993). A selected anthology has also been published: *Mukhtārāt: Qiṣaṣ* [*Selected Short Stories*] (London: Riad el-Rayyes, 1991).

[86] Indeed, Ḥāfiẓ argues that the modern Arabic short story "comes out from under al-Shārūnī's 'Overcoat'"! In "al-Uqṣūṣa al-Miṣriyya wa'l-Ḥadātha" ("The Egyptian Short Story and Modernity"), *Gālīrī 68*, October 1969, p. 86.

also account for his ability to successfully penetrate and represent the worlds of the self and the other in his texts.

Albeit focusing generally on the more mundane aspects of human experience, al-Shārūnī's short stories articulate the uncertainties and complexities of modern life, and the way in which these impinge on the dreams and goals of the individual. His narratives are often built on recurring themes and subject groups; in particular, his characters tend to be loners or outsiders, on the margins of society either by choice or by necessity. Alienated, isolated, often victimised or vilified, his archetypal characters include madmen, the physically or emotionally handicapped, bourgeois intellectuals, and the excluded, imprisoned or sequestrated. To use O'Connor's term, al-Shārūnī highlights the experiences of Egypt's "submerged population groups", so as to display the angst and anomie of the modern condition, and of the short story form itself.

Approach and Methodology

As we have seen, the self undergoes a constant process of temporal re-identifications throughout its lifetime. With this in mind, this study will consider how al-Shārūnī constructs, defines and then *re*-constructs and *re*-defines both the self and the other in his short stories, across a changing temporal context. Thus it will examine how the self and the other are perceived and represented within different narrative environments, at different historical junctures and in different locations and settings, through a chronological analysis of al-Shārūnī's most significant texts. The texts picked out for analysis here have been selected on the grounds that they cover a reasonable spread of material within a given historical period, and because they introduce or illustrate themes and character prototypes which might be described as characteristic of al-Shārūnī's writing. To restate my hypothesis, this study aims to show how al-Shārūnī's short stories demonstrate an evolutionary view of reality, represented by a dynamic, evolving narrative self and other. Further, it aims to reveal how these texts

are underpinned by an evolving ideological discourse, informed by the socio-political contexts within which they were produced.

It is difficult to provide a precise breakdown of my approach for, with its mix of practical criticism and critical and literary theory, this thesis is methodologically pluralistic and theoretically eclectic. In simple, practical terms, it is organised accordingly: the study is divided into five chronologically-ordered chapters, each of which contains analyses of four short stories. Each chapter is located within a specific time frame and its local historical, socio-political, economic and cultural context. In brief, these chapters are organised into the following time frames: the Second World War and its aftermath (Chapter One); the pre-revolutionary period (Chapter Two); the early years of the new regime (Chapter Three); Nasser's rule and the shift towards autocracy (Chapter Four); and the eras of Sadat and Mubarak (Chapter Five). Besides providing basic political and cultural data for its given period, each chapter will also discuss common concepts and themes, such as the narrative identities of the self and the other; prototypical characters and archetypal themes; the relationship between the individual and the collectivity; and ideology.

My scheme of analysis for each short story is as follows: first, a synopsis of the story is provided; second, a predominant, or *defining*, narrative "self" or subject is identified — being an implicit or explicit "ego" which maintains the discourse; third, the implicit or explicit "other"/s of this self is/are identified; and fourth, the discourse of the text is examined critically. To expand, the "self" and the "other" are considered within the theoretical frameworks elucidated earlier in this introduction, notably the theories of Descartes, Freud and Lacan, which are most suited to the texts (and some of which are even alluded to by al-Shārūnī himself). The text, meanwhile, is considered from various angles; in general, a global approach is taken, drawing on local social structures, the psycho-social condition of the writer, and the characteristics of the short story form. More specifically, the text is examined at the level of the

signifier, that is, by examining certain linguistic features (such as specific vocabulary, alliteration, assonance, and so on), and by analysing its diegesis and elements of its discourse (such as speakers, narrative time and space, and so on). The text is also examined at the level of the signified, within the contexts of ideology (e.g. nationalist, gender, or "Christian") and theory (e.g. psychoanalytic, structuralist or post-colonial); it is also considered within the context of a philosophical/epistemological reading, and by identifying binarisms and by considering the text's construction and its effect. In all, I attempt to provide both a poetic *and* a hermeneutic analysis of each short story.

Thus, as we may see, this thesis is not grounded in one particular theoretical approach. Loosely speaking, its methodology finds its roots in Marxist criticism, which takes the view that individuals (and texts) cannot be understood apart from their social and economic realities. In this way, al-Shārūnī's short stories are considered from the perspective of various ideological, social and economic determinants, and from the perspective of the systems of which they are part and from which they are generated. In particular, my thesis adheres to Lucien Goldmann's view that texts are based upon perpetually-evolving "trans-individual mental structures" or "world-views", belonging to certain social groups.[87] In this way, I attempt to illustrate how al-Shārūnī's short stories represent or embody a variety of world-views and ideologies, among them national (Egyptian), socio-economic (*petit-bourgeois*) and religious (Coptic) — even (if not, particularly) in cases where the author insists that his texts are detached from ideology.

My methodology also owes a great deal to the theories of the New Historicists and the Cultural Materialists, chiefly Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser. Both Foucault and Althusser assert that human life is shaped by social institutions and specifically by ideological discourses (as situated within the material institutions of religion, politics, the law and education). Equally, both reveal how dominant ideologies set out to

sustain social divisions, thereby keeping individuals ("subjects") and groups in their place. Amongst other things, these theories assist in revealing how social and political power operate through discourse, and how certain, "definitive" (i.e. dominant) discourses on human experience structure society and social relations. In this way, these theories constitute valuable tools for examining perceptions of, and relations between, the self and the other in narrative.

To close, it is hoped that this thesis will illustrate the hybridity and sheer diversity of differences within the self/other dialectic as represented in al-Shārūnī's short stories. This comes particularly in view of the fact that, to date, emphasis has been given largely to the polarities between the Arab world and the West which, although a topic of this thesis, is only one of a much larger number of themes pursued herein.

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[87] Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 3rd. ed. (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 87.

Chapter One

The Self and the Other

Between Past and Present

This first chapter is placed within the historical, socio-political and cultural contexts of the aftermath of the Second World War. The texts examined here were published between August 1946, the date of al-Shārūnī's first short story, "Jasad min Ṭīn" ("Body of Clay"),[1] and June 1950, when he published "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis" ("A Robbery on the Sixth Floor").[2] During these four-years, al-Shārūnī published ten short stories, most of them in the Beirut-based journal *al-Adīb*. This chapter selects four of these ten texts for close analysis, on the grounds that they cover a reasonable spread of material within the given historical period, and because they introduce or illustrate themes and character prototypes which might be described as characteristic of al-Shārūnī's writing. These texts are: "Jasad min Ṭīn"; "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū" ("The Killing of 'Abbās al-Ḥilū", 1948);[3] "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt" ("Zayṭa the Cripple-Maker", 1949);[4] and "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis". Each text is studied according to the scheme set out in the introduction. My analysis will begin with a brief overview of the political, social and economic transformations that came about in Egypt as a result of the Second World War, and with a discussion about the literary scene in Egypt at this time. Al-Shārūnī's early contribution to the short story genre will also be considered, and will be followed by the critiques of the four narratives listed above.

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[1] First published in the magazine *al-Sīnimā*, Cairo, August 1946. The story was omitted from the first edition of *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, but appeared in the second edition (Cairo: Dār al-Qawmiyya li'l-Ṭibā'a wa'l-Nashr, 1961), pp. 173-176.

[2] First published in *al-Fuṣūl*, Cairo, June 1950. Reprinted in *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, pp. 31-50.

[3] First published in *al-Adīb*, Beirut, December 1948. Reprinted in *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, pp. 59-68.

[4] First published in *al-Adīb*, Beirut, June 1949. Reprinted in *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, pp. 51-58.

The Second World War and its Aftermath

Officially, Egypt was a neutral state during the Second World War, although it served as a military base for the British and other troops, and several critical battles were fought on its soil. The reasserted imperial presence of the British had a significant impact on Egypt's economy and society: on the positive side, reduced imports and revenues from the troops' spending meant that industry developed, while some 200,000 Egyptians found employment with the British army, and many others established themselves as middle-men or suppliers.[5] On the negative side, the war brought rampant inflation, chronic shortages and the flourishing of the black market, to the detriment of the country's impoverished majority. Thus, in spite of the entrepreneurial possibilities created by the war, most of Egypt's wealth remained exactly where it had always been — in the hands of the traditional elites and a commercial middle class consisting largely of foreigners. Ironically, it was the Second World War which signalled the end of British hegemony in Egypt, since the financial and human costs incurred left Britain without either the means or the political will to sustain its former level of influence there.

With Britain on the retreat, Egypt emerged from the Second World War amid conflicting feelings of uncertainty, optimism and anger. Demands were made for a revision of the 1936 treaty, which had officially established Britain and Egypt as allies, and had promised the eventual withdrawal of British troops. This was followed by calls to overthrow the Egyptian monarchy, which the British had succeeded in reducing to a puppet regime, headed by a weak and disreputable king. Before long, extra-parliamentary groups emerged, which began to challenge the legitimacy of the existing political order. Meanwhile, the Egyptian public, who had become increasingly resentful of British interference and of the rivalries and corruption among the national

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[5] Derek Hopwood, *Egypt: Politics and Society 1945-1984*, 2nd. ed. (London: Unwin Hyman, 1985), p. 18.

elites, began to demand that the status quo be overturned — and by violent means if necessary.

By 1946, the year in which al-Shārūnī published his first short story, a nation-wide patriotic democratic movement had surfaced in Egypt. For six years, school and college students, factory workers and government employees led strikes, riots and demonstrations, while British military installations and businesses were attacked. The government responded by introducing onerous new restrictions on the freedoms of meeting, speech and the press, and by arresting anti-government agitators *en masse*. As Derek Hopwood writes: "The pressure of those years, with disturbances, tension, extremism, terrorism, the failures of the King and politicians, was something that had eventually to explode. It can now be seen as one of those periods of desperation that inevitably lead to radical change."[6]

In certain corners of Egypt, the rise of Nazism and Fascism in Europe, and the challenge these ideologies presented to the Western democratic model of constitutional government, had been viewed with growing interest. Home-grown political movements, such as the religio-political *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* (*The Muslim Brothers*) and the far-right *Miṣr al-Fatāh* (*Young Egypt*) emerged, with what many perceived as viable alternatives to Egypt's failed liberal democratic experiment. The disastrous Palestine war of 1948, which had led to the establishment of the state of Israel, was also effective in promoting the cause of the *Ikhwān*. The growth of the movement led to a rapid upsurge in political violence, culminating in the murder of Prime Minister Maḥmūd al-Nuqrāshī, also in 1948. It was only with the assassination of the *Ikhwān*'s founder, Shaykh Ḥasan al-Bannā, that the movement's activities were curtailed temporarily. Perhaps unsurprisingly, sectarian tensions began to surface during this period. As one scholar explains:

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[6] Ibid., p. 23.

> The decline of the Wafd and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood re-awakened the fears of the Copts. It is significant that, at this time, the first criticisms by the Copts of the official population statistics were heard and both groups accused each other of benefiting from the British occupation.[7]

One last political group to gain momentum at this time were the Communists. Hitherto, the Communists had lacked a support base of any genuine size or significance, due to there being no industrial working class to appeal to, and their rather non-representative membership (which was a mixture of intellectuals, minority members and foreigners). Following the establishment of the National Committee of Workers and Students in 1946, however, which aimed to centralise the activities of the patriotic democratic movement, the Communists were able to enhance their position through alliances with left-wing Wafdists, trade unionists and democrats.

With regard to Egyptian literature, the period immediately following the end of the Second World War witnessed a transition from old, established forms towards newer, more relevant and *avant-garde* alternatives. This was particularly evident in the Egyptian short story; according to Hafez, short story writers at this time divided generally into four groups or trends: the sentimental and melodramatic trend; the romantic trend; the realistic trend; and the experimental trend.[8] The first two trends failed to strike a lasting chord due to their escapist and excessively sentimental outlook, which meant that the last two groups (particularly the realistic trend) came to dominate the short story genre. Predominantly left-leaning, the members of this group exposed the plight of the urban poor, and focused on themes such as class relations and national independence. As Edwar al-Kharrat observes, "social" or "critical" realism had already appeared much earlier, in the works of writers such as Maḥmūd Taymūr and Maḥmūd

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[7] Chitham, op. cit., p. 108.

[8] Sabry Hafez, "Innovation in the Egyptian Short Story", in Robin Ostle (ed.), *Studies in Modern Arabic Literature* (Warminster, Wilts.: Aris and Phillips, 1975), pp. 101-102.

Ṭāhir Lāshīn, "but it was only in the late 1940s and 1950s that the *genre* became self-conscious and some writers dubbed themselves 'realists'".[9]

The experimental trend, of which al-Shārūnī was a proponent, had a far less immediate impact than realism. It was, however, part of a nascent modernist sensibility which went on to resurface in and dominate Arabic literature in the Sixties. Like their realist counterparts, the advocates of this trend connected strongly with their social reality, yet focused more on the individual than on society in general. They were the first to make extensive forays into the interior world of the character, their writings blending "symbolic, expressionistic and surrealistic traits".[10] The seeds of this experimental trend had in fact been sown some years previously, by such personalities as Salāma Mūsā (1887-1958), Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Luwīs 'Awaḍ (1915-90), and had taken shape in such *avant-garde* magazines as *al-Ṭaṭawwur*, *al-Majalla al-Jadīda*, *al-Bashīr*, and *al-Fuṣūl*. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī* was also highly influential, and was the first publication to introduce Egypt's post-war generation to Western modernist writers such as James Joyce, Franz Kafka, T. S. Eliot, Sartre and Camus.

Al-Shārūnī has been nominated the chief exponent of the post-war experimental trend in Egypt,[11] and was certainly one of its most innovative writers. When he first began publishing in the mid-1940s, the Egyptian short story was in a state of crisis, due to a dearth of new material by former champions of the genre, such as Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, Maḥmūd al-Badawī (1911?-85) and Najīb Maḥfūẓ (b. 1911) (who had since turned to the novel), and due to a proliferation of excessively sentimental texts, often of questionable technical value.[12] Added to this were the general anxieties and

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[9] Edwar al-Kharrat, "The Mashriq", in Robin Ostle (ed.), *Modern Literature in the Near and Middle East 1850-1970* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 181.
[10] Hafez, op. cit., p. 102.
[11] Ibid., p. 103.
[12] Ibid., p. 103.

uncertainties brought about by the war and the problems that followed it, which compelled writers to search for newer, more appropriate modes of expression. In the words of al-Kharrat, both realist and modernist writers at this time were responding to "some inherent necessity within the cultural enterprise itself; some urge for inner growth".[13]

Like so many others in his circle of writers and artists, al-Shārūnī was keen to explore the new possibilities for narrative, but strove always to maintain his independence and individuality. He cites two main interests and influences at this time: the existentialism of Sartre and Camus, to which he had become exposed through the pages of *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī*,[14] and Marxist ideology, although he claims that he was never a Marxist *per se*, and remained a Wafdist.[15] Rather than choosing to embrace the realistic trend, al-Shārūnī opted to move in a more *avant-garde* direction: he took the use of symbols and metaphors to new levels; he explored the psychological depths and motivations of his characters through techniques such as interior monologue; and he began to juxtapose the global dimensions of time and space with the local. In short, the narrative innovations he made during this period were the beginnings of a nascent modernist sensibility which would not gain currency for another decade, or even longer. Having established the socio-political and cultural framework for this chapter, let us turn now to the analyses of our four selected short stories.

1. "Jasad min Ṭīn" ("Body of Clay"), 1946

"Jasad min Ṭīn" portrays the relationship between Līzā, a devout young Coptic woman, and Muḥyī, her Muslim neighbour. Both are unmarried, and both are sexually

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[13] Al-Kharrat, op. cit., p. 180.

[14] Yūsuf al-Shārūnī, "Izdādat Khibratī wa Qillat Dahshatī" ("As My Experience Increased, My Wonder Decreased"), interview with Yāsīn Rifā'iyya in *Mukhtārāt min Ḥiwārāt Yūsuf al-Shārūnī* [*Yūsuf al-Shārūnī: Selected Interviews*] (Cairo: Maṭbū'āt al-Hay'a al-'Āmma li-Quṣūr al-Thaqāfa, 1999), p. 381.

[15] Bayḍūn, op. cit., p. 16. Traditionally, the Coptic vote lay squarely with the Wafd, especially once the *Ikhwān* began to gain in influence.

frustrated, and following a protracted flirtation they share a brief sexual liaison. Essentially, Līzā and Muḥyī share the same needs and desires, but the way in which each responds to the sexual act is radically different: Līzā is overcome by guilt and shame, and eventually commits suicide by throwing herself out of her bedroom window, while Muḥyī feels no guilt at their adulterous deed, and no sense of responsibility for Līzā's suicide. A subtly ideological text, "Jasad min Ṭīn" may be read allegorically, telling us much about the moral imperatives of Egyptian society in the post-war period, the status of women and relations between the sexes in general, and relations between Egypt's Copt and Muslim communities. It also introduces the most enduring theme in al-Shārūnī's short stories, being that of the conflict between the individual and society.

The Self and the Other: Distance and Desire

The narrative self of this short story is its Coptic protagonist, Līzā.[16] Deeply religious, yet emotionally and physically unfulfilled, her unhappiness is compounded by the fact that at the age of twenty-eight she is unmarried, and has begun to suspect that she will never know love. On account of her badly pock-marked face, Līzā is perceived as unattractive, but she takes comfort in her conviction that she has a strong, desirable body, and hopes that her physical beauty will eventually help her to find a suitor. Men disregard Līzā's physique, however, while her less attractive friends appear to have no trouble finding husbands. As the narrator notes: "She accused the young men of being stupid and inattentive, because they failed to notice her body, which she felt, warm and soft, whenever she curled up in bed on a cold night, muttering: 'How happy the man who holds me next to him will be!'"[17] Meanwhile, Līzā is locked in a cycle of fantasy, sexual torment, guilt and shame, and is caught in a conflict between her imaginative hunger, her moral conscience and the uncontrollable urgings of her neglected flesh.

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[16] While Līzā's religious identity is never stated explicitly, her name and other incidental details indicate that she is a Copt.

[17] "Jasad min Ṭīn", p. 173.

Līzā's other is her neighbour, Muḥyī, the twenty-year-old medical student from Sūhāg who becomes her lover. He too is sexually repressed and inexperienced, and is anxious to shake off the ignorance of adolescence, and to make the sexual transition to manhood. While the self and the other express the same desires, there is nonetheless great emotional and ideological distance between them: unlike Līzā, Muḥyī never considers love in its spiritual dimension, and is concerned solely with meeting girls and discovering the pleasures of naked women. What is more, his quest for sexual knowledge disregards all moral, ethical and even aesthetic considerations, his only motivation being to lose his virginity.

Interaction between the self and the other is limited, and marked by distance. Across the alley that divides them, they engage in a period of mutual flirtation when, after catching Muḥyī spying on her as she lies half-naked on her bed one evening, Līzā knowingly permits her neighbour to admire her on further occasions. Flattered and excited that he has noticed her body, she feels it becoming "more beautiful day by day",[18] and justifies this voyeuristic exchange by the willed delusion that Muḥyī's sightings of her are "coincidences".[19] Fully conscious of the incompatibility between "the demands of a body of clay, and her soul's demands for salvation and that she remain chaste and pure",[20] Līzā refuses to acknowledge any reciprocity to this flirtation, even going so far as to convince herself "that the Devil had chosen this young man to seduce her",[21] yet all the while longing "more and more to give her body freely to this Devil".[22]

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[18] Ibid., p. 173.
[19] Ibid., p. 174.
[20] Ibid., p. 174.
[21] Ibid., p. 174.
[22] Ibid., p. 174.

Gender Realities and Sectarian World-Views

The narrative discourse of "Jasad min Ṭīn" conceals a number of ideological orientations, which may be exposed by a closer reading of the relationship between the self and the other. A gender reading of the text, for example, reveals the subject position of the Egyptian female in relation to her male other. Al-Shārūnī reconstructs this relationship by locating the self and the other in oppositional narrative worlds, with each character expressing his/her own gender reality and gender-specific world-view. Tellingly, the self (as female) is defined almost exclusively by exterior criteria, such as her looks, her physique and, most significantly, her behaviour. For, while her age and face alone are sufficient to discourage any would-be suitors, it is the loss of Līzā's virginity which ultimately seals her fate, for without it she is certain to never be able to find a husband. A tragic character even before she takes her own life, the self is confined to an isolated environment, and is condemned to a life of loneliness, frustration and social exclusion.

Notably, the self's potential for action is extremely limited, and is restricted to either the mind or the domestic space of her room, from which she is subject to her family's control and government. (In fact, the only time that we see Līzā leave her room is when she jumps from her window to her death.) This is not to suggest that the text proposes that Līzā lacks the will or even the ability for action, but that the society to which she belongs is at the root of her predicament. Indeed, the text highlights the dynamism of Līzā's inner self, exposing the rich possibilities of her desiring imagination. It shows how Līzā flies in her dreams to unexplored and magical lands, "where she would roam freely, constantly and curiously, as though searching for treasure, until her breath became exhausted and her body trembled".[23] Besides giving expression to Līzā's repressed desires, these dreams also help her to expand her existence beyond the parameters delimited by her sex and religion, and to realise a side of her self independently of the other. As Salman Rushdie observes:

> The dream is part of our very essence. Given the gift of self-consciousness, we can dream versions of ourselves, new selves for old. Waking as well as sleeping, our response to the world is essentially *imaginative*: that is, picture-making. [...] We first construct pictures of the world and then we step inside the frames.[24]

Unsurprisingly, the other (as male) is beset by few of the self's limitations or anxieties. He is younger, freer and far less inhibited, with the future and all that it promises ahead of him. He is an active, rather than passive, character, and is far less susceptible to the dictates of ideology, be it religious or social. While he too constructs an image of his ideal self through fantasy, he is far more open to concrete forms of experience, and his character has real scope for growth and development. In short, Muḥyī's character represents how power relations between the sexes at this time were skewed firmly in favour of the Egyptian male.

At the heart of Līzā's female subjectivity is the fact that she lacks an affirmative, coherent sense of identity: she has the feelings, desires and body of a woman, but is nonetheless experientially and socially "incomplete". Thus she seeks the wholeness or harmony of union with a man, although there is dramatic irony in the fact that her liaison with Muḥyī actually drives her to self-destruction.[25] From a gender perspective, Līzā represents how the Egyptian woman is constructed and defined by and in relation to her male other: by the dictates of a patriarchal faith and society; by having her body acknowledged and claimed by man; and by her act of submission to a dominant, masculine other. As Julien Benda states: "The body of man makes sense in itself quite apart from that of woman, whereas the latter seems wanting in significance by itself. [...] Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself

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[23] Ibid., p. 173.

[24] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), pp. 377-378.

[25] Thus there is also irony in al-Shārūnī's choice of the name "Muḥyī", which means "the giver of life".

without man."[26] Perhaps the most suggestive image of the female self is embedded in the story's title: this "body of clay" illustrates how Līzā has been socially, spiritually and emotionally moulded, waiting, as it were, for a man to "breathe life into" her.

The relationship between the self and the other may also be read as an allegory for relations between Egypt's Muslims and Copts, with each character representing his/her respective religious community. Clearly, this relationship is less than harmonious; there is an unmistakable tension between Līzā and Muḥyī, and their interaction is marked by mutual mistrust and a lack of knowledge of the other. Further, while Līzā and Muḥyī share certain common characteristics, they are shown to have fundamentally oppositional identities, and to inhabit different moral universes. One way in which the text illustrates this is by highlighting the protagonists' attitudes towards sin and responsibility. For Līzā, sin is a pregiven element of her identity, reflecting the Christian notion of the "original" sin, for which she should accept to live a righteous life of suffering, shame and hardship. Muḥyī, meanwhile, takes the Islamic view that sin is not an inherited state of being, but, since human beings are created or finite creatures, they are naturally limited, weak and subject to temptation.[27] As such, Muḥyī perceives sin as merely an act of disobedience of which he is capable of redemption or reform, and thus he has no moral conflict in his inner self.

Besides the concept of sin, there is also the related concept of responsibility. Christianity takes the view that sin may be transferable and/or communal in nature, and it is perhaps for this reason that Līzā decides to take her life, since exposure of her crime would bring shame and dishonour not only to her family, but to the entire Coptic community. By contrast, Muḥyī feels no compunction to kill himself, or to suffer vicariously or atone for Līzā's actions. This represents the Islamic view that each

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[26] Julien Benda, quoted in Simone de Beauvoir's "Woman and the Other", in *Literature in the Modern World*, ed. Dennis Walder (Oxford: O.U.P., 1990), p. 307.

[27] John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, 2nd. ed. (Oxford: O.U.P., 1994), p. 29.

individual is responsible for his or her own deeds, and that no individual can bear another's responsibility. As the *Qur'ān* (3:115) reads: "Nor can a bearer of burdens bear another's burden."

At a first reading of "Jasad min Ṭīn", it may appear that the Muslim is an evil predator who feeds on the vulnerable, impressionable Copt. Certainly, Līzā comes to perceive Muḥyī as an instrument of the Devil, if not the Devil himself:

> She began to be convinced that it had not been a man who had embraced her wonderful body that night, but an evil spirit, which had departed to its world after seducing her. She began to go over all the legends and stories she had heard in her childhood about how devils had succeeded in tempting virgins such as herself.[28]

Even the narrator appears to find Muḥyī to be of questionable character, describing him as "a ravenous wolf, searching for prey wherever he could".[29] Yet, on closer inspection, we find that the narrative discourse is ambivalent, with the narrator revealing how each character exploits the other for his or her own purposes. Particularly, we see how Līzā feigns her resistance to Muḥyī, and how she is fully cognisant of the sin she is committing:

> She resisted him at first. Then she told him about life, and how it is a vale of hardship and tears, and how the body and soul have contradictory demands, and how we must triumph in this battle — in spite of our pain — and put an end to the passions and desires of the body, and elevate and purify the soul. She saw consternation in the student's eyes, and feared that he might be convinced by what she was saying ... [30]

The relations between Copts and Muslims in this text should also be considered in the light of the socio-political context. As we have seen, this was an era of tension, fear and oppression, when personal and political freedoms were restricted and sectarian sentiment was on the rise. As groups such as the *Ikhwān* began to gain in

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[28] "Jasad min Ṭīn", p. 175.
[29] Ibid., p. 174.

influence, the Copts, already conscious of the Muslims' numerical and social privileges, became more anxious that their interests remain protected and secure. Paradoxically, this had the effect of making certain sectors of the Coptic community increasingly isolationist and insular in outlook, a situation which appears to be reflected in the way the text represents its two main characters: Muḥyī has the power to be independent, bold and daring, while Līzā's is a fear-filled, rather hidebound existence.

It should not be understood from "Jasad min Ṭīn" that the Copt and Muslim communities were discrete entities at this time. Indeed, the fact that Līzā and Muḥyī live in such close spatial proximity reminds us that, for the greater part, their communities interacted in almost every area of life. Nor can it be denied, however, that there is distance and conflict between the self and the other, and that no lasting union ever emerges between them. One interpretation of this phenomenon is that, while the nationalist sensibility was predominant at this time, there was as yet no unifying sense of national identity that brought Egyptian Copts and Muslims together as equals. Rather, the nationalist scene was a fragmented forum for the conflicting views of various interest groups, each of which looked to the others with suspicion and, sometimes, hostility. Hence the cautionary, and rather negative, "moral" to this tale is that to trespass onto the space of the other, or to transgress the norms of the identifying group, can lead to disastrous, or possibly even fatal, consequences.

An interesting feature of the discourse of "Jasad min Ṭīn" is that it reveals a fusion of traditional and modernist narrative elements. Thematically and structurally, the text contains features of classic tragedy, in that it dramatises the conflict between the vitality of the individual, and life, its limits and laws. As such, Līzā is a tragic heroine, who reaches new heights of experience by violating a taboo, but who is eventually destroyed by her hubristic act. The text is also replete with allusions to the Old

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[30] Ibid., p. 174.

Testament, drawing on themes and motifs from the Book of Genesis in particular: the story's title "Body of Clay" connotes God's creation of Adam from the dust of the earth; Muḥyī tempts Līzā to sleep with him just as the serpent tempts Eve to eat the forbidden fruit; and Līzā's fall reflects that of her forebears, Adam and Eve.

Yet, there is also much which illustrates al-Shārūnī's early experiments with modernism: salient points include his exploration of the psychic lives of his characters, which he achieves largely through the use of an omniscient narrator, who has access to their dreams, consciences and motivations. He also makes tentative use of the free direct style, which renders thought as reported speech and gives the illusion of access to the characters' minds:

> She felt that the young man had humiliated her. She tried in vain to understand why it was not she who had emerged victorious. Hadn't she got what she had wanted? Then there was her conscience — her conscience, which she had quelled when her body had revolted, and which had now returned anew, to crush her almost mercilessly. And then there was society — what if she were pregnant? What if her family and friends found out?[31]

Another point is al-Shārūnī's extensive use of symbol and metaphor, which even inform the story's title (hitherto, authors had tended to draw titles for their narratives from characters' names, or themes). Space, too, is deployed symbolically, reinforcing and reflecting the text's thematic development: the two facing bedrooms which Līzā and Muḥyī inhabit function as physical, emotional and ideological prison cells, while at the same time serving as eyes on the world.[32] They are also a spatial representation of the female-male/Copt-Muslim divides, and warn of the consequences of venturing into the unknown space of the other.

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[31] Ibid., p. 175.

[32] In the case of Līzā, her room also functions similarly to the "attic" metaphor detailed in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). Ostensibly, Līzā is a dangerously sexual, "mad" or hysterical figure, and is imprisoned within a room which represents the strict codes of gender conduct.

Among the many themes in this text, perhaps the most significant is that of the conflict between the individual and society, which is undoubtedly the most prominent in al-Shārūnī's entire *œuvre*. It is also the most politically and artistically forceful, and is a conduit for much of the ideological content of his stories. Society, as we encounter it in this and other narratives, is represented as a repressive, hostile structure or system, which prohibits or restricts the individual and his/her freedoms. At its centre lies its point of origin, the state (another commonly-recurring, though often deeply-embedded, motif), whose institutions and mechanisms serve to socialise or "naturalise" the individual. In view of the frequency with which this structure appears in al-Shārūnī's texts, I have identified it throughout this thesis under the generic title of "the hegemonic other".

In respect of the above, we may argue that both Līzā and Muḥyī share the common experience of being selves in conflict with the hegemonic other, lending a rebellious, or even revolutionary, dimension to the narrative. Consider Muḥyī's declaration:

> There used to be a bit of a struggle, and I got over it. But it was not between the demands of the body and the soul. Rather, it was between my own demands and the demands of society. I saw society's demands as being cruel and tyrannical, whereas mine were just and delicious! And so the struggle ended.[33]

While neither as radical nor as confident as Muḥyī, Līzā too is rebellious, for her sleeping with Muḥyī is in itself a reaction against the repressive patriarchism of her society and her religion. Thus, the narrative does not take issue with Līzā's "sinfulness", but appears to rebuke the system which inhibits her emotionally and personally. Similarly, the reader finds that s/he is not so much shocked by the act of transgression between the two characters, but by the futility of Līzā's suicide, and by the injustice which led her to it. Therefore, we may see how the nemesis theme of the text is overturned to support an anti-hegemonic ideological discourse.

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[33] "Jasad min Ṭīn", p. 174.

By the time that "Jasad min Ṭīn" was written, the tragic theme of the fallen woman was by no means new in Arabic literature. Yet this short story marks a particular development, in that it scrupulously avoids the authorial intrusions, didacticism and other unsubtleties of stories on this theme by earlier writers. Instead, al-Shārūnī prefers to rely on a direct yet intimate narrative voice, which offers no moral judgements or conclusions to the story, preferring to invite the reader to draw his/her own.

2. Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū ("The Killing of 'Abbās al-Ḥilū"), 1948

"Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū" is the first of two stories employing characters and events taken from Najīb Maḥfūẓ's novel *Zuqāq al-Midaqq* (*Midaq Alley*),[34] set in Cairo at the end of the Second World War. 'Abbās al-Ḥilū, as he appears in both Maḥfūẓ's novel and al-Shārūnī's short story, is a humble barber who, at the instigation of his rebellious friend Ḥusayn Kirsha and ambitious fiancée Ḥamīda, leaves his home in Midaq Alley to seek his fortune as a worker with the British army. During his absence, Ḥamīda absconds with Faraj Ibrāhīm, a wealthy man whom she believes loves and wishes to marry her, but who is in fact a pimp, set on luring her into prostitution. 'Abbās is distraught and ashamed at Ḥamīda's betrayal, and is shocked when he meets her later, dressed in elegant clothes and jewellery. Feigning contrition, Ḥamīda insists that Faraj Ibrāhīm tricked into her life of sin and degradation, and convinces 'Abbās that her — and his — honour must be avenged. They decide that 'Abbās should come to the bar where she works, and confront the man who seduced her. A few days before the appointed time, however, 'Abbās catches sight of Ḥamīda, drinking and flirting amid a crowd of British soldiers. Momentarily incensed, he attacks her and strikes her in the face with a bottle, causing the inebriated soldiers to beat him to death.

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[34] (Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, 1947). Translated into English as *Midaq Alley*, trans. Trevor Le Gassick, corrected ed. (London: Heinemann, 1975).

Published one year after *Zuqāq al-Midaqq*, "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū" selects just one of the many plot-lines from Maḥfūẓ's novel, reproducing certain aspects of the original narrative, expanding on others and, in many cases, adding entirely new material. Among the points that the two texts have in common are the themes of Egypt's shift from the pre-modern to the modern age, and of the social and cultural changes that came about at the time of, and often as a result of, the Second World War. Both texts have a strong historical element, and give a faithful representation of Egypt during the war years, its morals, manners, values and conflicting ideologies. They also give reference to events and personages of the era, and illustrate how war can contribute to the dissolution of class, age and gender barriers. As such, one of the principal themes of both Maḥfūẓ's and al-Shārūnī's texts is that of the conflict between tradition and modernity.

The Self and the Other Between Tradition and Modernity

The narrative self here is 'Abbās al-Ḥilū, who represents the traditional element in Midaq Alley. He is a kind, uncomplicated, if rather simple young man, rooted firmly in the alley, its heritage and customs, his inclination to laziness stemming from a contented view of his life, its routines and certainties. As the narrator tells us: "Al-Ḥilū's life was slow and repetitive; he did not tire of its monotonous continuity, nor did he strive to alter or change it."[35] To friends such as Ḥusayn Kirsha and Ḥamīda, however, 'Abbās' modest aspirations seem apathetic and unambitious, and they perceive him as backward, rather parochial, and dull. Yet, as both Maḥfūẓ and al-Shārūnī demonstrate, 'Abbās is not as resolutely settled as other residents of the alley, such as 'Amm Kāmil the *basbūsa* seller and the venerable and pious Raḍwān al-Ḥusaynī. For, in spite of his deep-seated misgivings, 'Abbās is curious to learn what the world outside the alley can offer, and finds himself gravitating (albeit hesitantly) towards it. Ḥusayn Kirsha is an influence behind this transformation, "filling him ['Abbās] with a kind of doubt about the value of the life he was living, and about the

true meaning of the values to which he clung, which found the bases of their support in the scent and gloom of the alley".[36] In effect, Ḥusayn Kirsha destabilises 'Abbās' sense of traditional identity, instilling in him feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy.

Albeit on a very small scale, 'Abbās is a symbol for a pre-modern, underdeveloped Egypt, inching tentatively — and at times reluctantly — towards modernity. At times he seems like a curious child, taking his first exhilarating, yet perilous, steps into the unknown. Before him lies the promise of "another world, crowded with ambitious schemes and designs, clamouring with disputes and struggles for victory over power and money";[37] a world which dazzles and yet disturbs him, and where "his values are demolished and his personality diminished".[38] It is a world inhabited by the others of the narrative, among them Ḥusayn Kirsha, Ḥamīda and Faraj Ibrāhīm, who — unlike 'Abbās — feel too good for Midaq Alley, displaying a confidence that is noticeably absent in the self. They are also overtly inclined towards a modern Egypt, and all that it offers in terms of wealth and opportunity. Driven by ambition, greed and material desire, they are the embodiment of the economic consciousness of the era, dominated by the capitalist and materialist ideologies. Significantly, all three are in the employ of Western capitalists, namely the British: Ḥusayn Kirsha works for its military authorities, while Ḥamīda sells her body to its soldiers, and Faraj Ibrāhīm is her pimp.

In short, the narrative self and the other are constructed and define themselves oppositionally. 'Abbās, the traditional, conservative self, is a son of the ancient alley, and is constructed from its culture, its sights, sounds and smells. He is God-fearing, innocent, gentle and sincere. By contrast, his friends Ḥusayn and Ḥamīda, representatives of a modern, materialistic other, have abandoned their primary

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[35] "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū", p. 62.
[36] Ibid., p. 62.
[37] Ibid., p. 62.

identifications with the alley, and have reconstructed themselves in line with life in the modern metropolis. They are amoral, dissolute and emotionally hard and indifferent, and either dupe, drop or destroy 'Abbās once he has given in to their whims. It should also be noted that 'Abbās' sense of identity is still fundamentally communal, although this is steadily undermined and eroded throughout the narrative, reflecting the emerging primacy of the individual in Egyptian society.

The Dialogue Between Maḥfūẓ and al-Shārūnī (1)

Inasmuch as "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū" and *Zuqāq al-Midaqq* have many elements in common, al-Shārūnī's text also has numerous features which serve to distinguish it from Maḥfūẓ's original. First, and most significant, is the type of narration itself: *Zuqāq al-Midaqq* is a third-person narration, rendered by a relatively anonymous, undramatised narrator. "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū", meanwhile, is presented in the form of an address, "delivered" by a dramatised narrator as though before a court of law, presumably at a legal inquiry or inquest. The identity of the narrator cannot be ascertained fully; he asserts that he is "not a legal specialist",[39] yet is clearly well-educated, demonstrating an awareness of court etiquette (as when he addresses his monologue to "Your Honours, Your Worships"),[40] and using terminology appropriate to legal discourse.[41] Although starting with the first-person "I", the narrator gradually assumes the plural "we", thereby presenting himself as a spokesperson for 'Abbās, if not for the entire alley, or all of Egypt, or all humanity.

Unlike the narrator of *Zuqāq al-Midaqq*, the narrator of "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū" is a highly confrontational personality. He rejects the findings of the investigator's report into 'Abbās' death, which describes the identities of 'Abbās' killers as "unknown".

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[38] Ibid., p. 62.
[39] Ibid., p. 60.
[40] Ibid., p. 59.
[41] As such, it is unlikely that the narrator is a resident of the alley. Rather, I would argue that the narrative voice is a persona for the author himself.

Instead, he announces that he and his supporters have decided to "disregard this official report",[42] and to draw their own conclusions as to the crime and its perpetrators. He contends that responsibility for 'Abbās' death goes way beyond that set out in the official report, explaining:

> We have found that the best way of ensuring that we identify the accused is to accuse the entire era. [...] As such, our accusation includes those soldiers who dealt him the fatal bottle blows to his head and neck; those who took part in producing those bottles; and those who gave birth to the soldiers in the first place. Our accusation also includes those closest to 'Abbās, who knew him and kept his company, and even those world leaders who led the war, and who put the soldiers in the bar on the night of the incident. It would seem, Sirs, that the killing of 'Abbās al-Ḥilū, a young man of twenty-three working as a barber in Midaq Alley in Cairo, was indeed a crime committed by an [entire] era.[43]

In spite of the potentially inflammatory content of his address, the narrator strives at all times to use elegant, formal language, presumably so as to lend gravitas to his testimony and imbue his narration with authority. He also enhances the rhetorical quality of his monologue by adding elements of drama, and makes ample use of irony, betraying a keen sardonic streak:

> No doubt you are laughing at the futility of this accusation, for it concerns an abstract term, and does not refer to distinct individuals whom we can see, touch, hate and punish with the "justice" to which you constantly aspire.[44]

He is unequivocal in his contempt for Egypt's so-called "justice" system, even going so far as to describe it as "blindfolded",[45] alluding to the fact that, while the identities of the soldiers who killed 'Abbās are probably known, "no one will dare prosecute them, for they are the imperial masters of Egypt, beyond the reach of the law".[46] By this, the narrator accuses the Egyptian state of collusion with its imperialist occupiers.

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[42] "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū", p. 60.
[43] Ibid., pp. 60-61.
[44] Ibid., p. 61.
[45] Ibid., p. 61.

Unfailingly polite, the narrator couches his criticisms in terms of supercilious respect, as when he assures the court: "Nevertheless, we shall of course observe your traditions"[47] — yet proceeds promptly to undermine them and to draw up his own so-called "bill of indictment".[48] Indeed, the narrator does not hesitate to assert that his own investigation into 'Abbās al-Ḥilū's death "throws better light on the tragedy than the report does",[49] adding acerbically: "It may be that my lack of legal specialisation permits me to think and accuse freely, something not permitted of the professional investigator."[50] His criticisms are not only directed towards the establishment, but close with an attack on his fellow country-men, claiming: "We all existed on the night of that incident, going through our motions, bearing the history of mankind on our shoulders, [and] yet we did nothing for him."[51] Describing 'Abbās' death as an act of sacrifice or "liberation",[52] the narrator explains how 'Abbās had to "pay the price"[53] for this liberation, and was forsaken by those who "breathed with him in one and the same era, and who ate bread with him, perhaps made in the same bakery or taken from the same wheat field".[54] In this way, the narrator depicts 'Abbās as a martyr, or unsung hero or saviour, who tried to reconcile his traditional values with those of an alien, modern world, so as to improve his prospects and secure a future with the woman he loved.

The narrator also shows how 'Abbās steered a course through the excesses of the alley's other inhabitants, such as 'Amm Kāmil on one side, lazily ensconced in the

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[46] Matti Moosa, *The Early Novels of Naguib Mahfouz: Images of Modern Egypt* (Gainesville, Fl.: University Press of Florida, 1994), p. 97.
[47] "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū", p. 61.
[48] Ibid., p. 64.
[49] Ibid., p. 60.
[50] Ibid., p. 60.
[51] Ibid., p. 68.
[52] Ibid., p. 67.
[53] Ibid., p. 67.
[54] Ibid., p. 68.

alley's "dreamlike stupor",[55] and Ḥusayn and Ḥamīda on the other, who sell themselves to the British, yet to no real personal gain. Thus, the narrator accuses 'Abbās' compatriots of cowardice and complacency, arguing: "We denied him his right to be liberated, in case he liberated us with him, and we took refuge in our ignorance and in our past and future good deeds."[56] In view of the context within which this text is set, the "liberation" promised by 'Abbās' death would appear to include liberation from the British occupiers, liberation from a corrupt, self-serving establishment, and liberation from the darker forces of tradition, which constrict the individual and suppress its personal growth.

As does Maḥfūẓ, al-Shārūnī makes symbolic use of narrative space in "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū", representing the alley and the city so vividly that they effectively qualify as characters in themselves. The alley — or site of traditionalism — is relatively isolated, narrow and confined, while the city beyond it — the site of modernity and development — has no limits in any form. What is different about al-Shārūnī's text is that it introduces a third spatial/thematic dimension: the global. Besides focusing on the interplay between the space of the alley and the space of the modern metropolis (with modern Cairo, as the centre, symbolising Egypt as a whole), al-Shārūnī extends this by adding a universal element. In itself, this reflects one of the phenomena of modernity: as cities such as Cairo grow and transform in the modern age, the world necessarily becomes smaller as a result, particularly as trade and communication networks proliferate and expand. Thus, "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū" demonstrates the uncertainties and changing realities of a world that is at once expanding and shrinking, so that the general becomes the personal, and the local becomes the universal.

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[55] Ibid., p. 61.
[56] Ibid., p. 68.

Another feature of al-Shārūnī's text is that it adds new material to the story of 'Abbās' death. One example of this is that he expands on characters' motivations, or invents certain details, such as the name of the bar in which 'Abbās was killed, and the histories of two of the soldiers who were drinking there. The narrator even claims that the jeweller who made Ḥamida's brooch and earrings was in the same street as the jeweller who made a necklace 'Abbās bought for her. As he explains, this detail was uncovered only after 'Abbās' death, thereby taking Maḥfūẓ's narrative beyond its original temporal limits. Meanwhile, environmental details, motivations, circumstances, and cause and effect set the context for a philosophical consideration of human values and fate, with the narrator challenging traditional notions of predestination and foreordination. As he observes:

> Six years earlier, Hitler had declared war on England and then on Russia. By that, the destinies of millions of humans had been decided by what you call "fate". It had been decided that this one would die by drowning, that these would be bereaved and those widowed, that Ḥamīda would become a prostitute, and that her fiancé 'Abbās al-Ḥilū would be killed on reaching the age of twenty-three. For the conflict in that era was not restricted only to those who willed it, declared it and took part in it, but extended to others who held no opinion about this battle, and who tried in vain to avoid being touched by its fire. And so each one took part with what he possessed or with what he could do — Ḥamīda with her body, and 'Abbās al-Ḥilū with his destiny.[57]

Like al-Shārūnī, it would appear that the narrator is a humanist, who sees the concept of "fate" as merely a ploy by which mankind can absolve itself of any action or responsibility. As he points out, everyone prepared for his or her "role"[58] in 'Abbās' killing, therefore it was an act of will, rather than a random, or foreordained, event.

The last area of difference between al-Shārūnī's and Maḥfūẓ's texts lies in the fact that "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū" has a subtly different narrative ethos to that of *Zuqāq al-Midaqq*. In Maḥfūẓ's novel, the self-containment and timelessness of the alley is foregrounded, as is its general imperviousness to change. According to Matti Moosa:

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[57] Ibid., p. 63.

"*Zuqaq al-Midaqq* is overshadowed by pessimism, gloom and misfortune",[59] while Robin Ostle notes: "In the Cairene novels of Mahfuz, most of the characters are blocked. They suffer from an inability to transform their fate by normal endeavour and action. Ambition and reality are somehow incompatible."[60] By contrast, al-Shārūnī's text is much more open to the possibility of change, and is far more future-oriented in its outlook, making for an altogether more positive and optimistic narrative. In this way, it perceives 'Abbās' killing as a catalyst for change, rather than accepting it as a tragic, irreversible fact of "fate".

Generally speaking, "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū" shows how al-Shārūnī has taken one of the many plot-lines from Maḥfūẓ's original novel, and adapted it to the short story form. He achieves this by a number of means: first, while Maḥfūẓ's novel has no dominant character, and illustrates the processes of time and change over an extended period, al-Shārūnī's text privileges one main character, and focuses on just one critical moment when that change crystallises. Second, he takes 'Abbās al-Ḥilū's death and places it under a microscope, thereby enlarging its scope and impact. He achieves this by taking Maḥfūẓ's story beyond its original narrative parameters, and placing it and its characters into an international, or global, framework. As such, 'Abbās' killing, which takes place in a bar in the back streets of Cairo, becomes a subject of universal political and moral significance. Similarly, al-Shārūnī expands the code of causality in his narrative, revealing how this seemingly random event was in fact the culmination of a series of interrelated factors and incidents, carried out by a global network of actors and middle-men. Below, the narrator explains how the murder weapon, a wine bottle, made its way into the hands of 'Abbās' killer:

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[58] Ibid., p. 66.
[59] Moosa, op. cit., p. 102.
[60] Robin Ostle, "The Arab World", in *Modern Literature in the Near and Middle East, 1850-1970*, p. 114.

> Ten years ago in Paris, there were workers producing empty bottles. Nine years ago in Lyons, there were others who filled these bottles with wine ... These bottles travelled — some were exported to the West, while others were exported to the East. Some bottles rolled from the hands of one merchant to another, their numbers becoming fewer and fewer each time, until some of them came to rest in one of the streets in Cairo. And two days before al-Ḥilū's death, one of these bottles found its way onto a shelf in the Victory Bar, within reach of one of the soldiers ... [61]

In short, al-Shārūnī explores the overdetermined nature of 'Abbās' death, while reminding us of the complex interconnectedness of human experience.[62]

Some critics have argued that "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū" lends nothing new to the story as it first appears in Maḥfūẓ's novel. Certainly, parts of the text are merely synopses of events in the original narrative, and there is even evidence of certain phrases or passages being copied verbatim. As 'Aṭiyya argues:

> It is a credible intellectual analysis, but I believe it is merely an analysis, and not a story. He does not elaborate on the known incident of al-Ḥilū's death, and does no more than analyse the facts of the known story, other than [to say] that it is also a tragedy for mankind.[63]

Similarly, Fawzī al-'Intīl complains:

> Yūsuf's work is no more than that of the reader who is moved by the character; it is not the work of the story-writer. As a story-writer who understands his work, Najīb Maḥfūẓ would not interfere in the domain of the reader, telling him that "'Abbās al-Ḥilū died because of the war", or, as Yūsuf

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[61] "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū", p. 65.

[62] In his introduction to "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū" on its first publication in *al-Adīb*, al-Shārūnī wrote: "This story parallels the existence of UNESCO in Beirut, for both reveal the degree of unity linking the world. The story of 'Abbās al-Ḥilū expresses this in an artistic way, whereas UNESCO expresses it in a practical way." Quoted by Ḥusayn Muruwwa in his "Yūsuf al-Shārūnī Bayna al-Rūmānsiyya wa'l-Wāqi'iyya" ("Yūsuf al-Shārūnī Between Romanticism and Realism"), in Nabīl Faraj (ed.), *Yūsuf al-Shārūnī Mubdi'an wa Nāqidan* [*Yūsuf al-Shārūnī: Creator and Critic*] (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li'l-Kitāb, 1995), p. 20.

[63] Aḥmad Muḥammad 'Aṭiyya, "Ma'a Insān al-Shārūnī min al-Azma ... ilā al-Naksa" ("The Individual and al-Shārūnī: From the Crisis to the Setback"), in *al-Iltizām wa'l-Thawra fi'l-Adab al-'Arabī al-Ḥadīth* [*Commitment and Revolution in Modern Arabic Literature*] (Beirut and Tripoli: Dār al-'Awda/Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1974), p. 195.

> says: "Al-Ḥilū had returned from al-Tall al-Kabīr to find that everything had been prepared for his death."[64]

Al-'Intīl also claims that "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū" is not a story in its own right, but is merely a criticism of Maḥfūẓ's novel. This, he argues, appears to imply that Maḥfūẓ's original novel was "incomplete".

In defence of al-Shārūnī, I would argue that these criticisms fail to recognise the subtleties of "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū", and overlook the points of divergence between its discourse and that of Maḥfūẓ's novel. I would also suggest that al-'Intīl's charge that this is "not the work of a story-writer" stems from his resistance to al-Shārūnī's use of modernist devices (such as interior monologue and perspectivism), compared with Maḥfūẓ's very accessible, realistic prose. Furthermore, al-Shārūnī's critics fail to recognise the modernist use of intertextuality here, and the modernist acceptance of voluntary limitations. For, while "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū" adheres to the narrative data provided by Maḥfūẓ and is faithful to their details, it also creates a new story. Lastly, it should also be considered that, while this is not one of al-Shārūnī's most original creations, it is nonetheless one of his earliest texts, and reflects a willingness to experiment with both subject matter and form. It also demonstrates al-Shārūnī's ability to spot the makings of a seminal text; written only months after *Zuqāq al-Midaqq* was first published, al-Shārūnī argues that Maḥfūẓ was still a relatively new writer at this time, and that his novel had not yet acquired its contemporary, "classic" status.[65] As a friend and associate of al-Shārūnī, Maḥfūẓ has never taken issue with "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū", or with the next story analysed here, which also takes its inspiration from *Zuqāq al-Midaqq*.

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[64] Fawzī al-'Intīl, "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa" ("The Five Lovers"), in Faraj, op. cit., p. 128.

3. "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt" ("Zayṭa the Cripple-Maker"), 1949

"Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt" was published in the year that al-Shārūnī left Egypt to work as a teacher in the Sudan, a post he held until 1952. As with "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū", it is dedicated to Najīb Maḥfūẓ, and takes its leading character from *Zuqāq al-Midaqq*. In Maḥfūẓ's novel, Zayṭa is a relatively minor character, yet is possibly also its most unique. Unlike 'Abbās al-Ḥilū, who is central to the life and action of the alley, Zayṭa is a shadowy, peripheral individual who lives in a shed attached to Ḥusniyya's bakery, emerging only at night to engage in grave-robbing and, principally, cripple-making. This "extraordinary art",[66] as Maḥfūẓ describes it, entails maiming, blinding and disfiguring the poor, so that they can find employment as professional beggars. Despised by the other residents of the alley, Zayṭa rarely ventures out to face their loathing and contempt. The last we see of him in *Zuqāq al-Midaqq* is when he and his accomplice, the dentist Dr. Būshī, are imprisoned for stealing gold teeth from a recently-interred corpse.

By contrast, "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt" sees Zayṭa take the pivotal role of protagonist, with the alley and its residents relegated to the background. The text starts off from where Maḥfūẓ's novel ends, with the narrator informing us that it has now been two years since Zayṭa's arrest, and that he died in prison a few days ago. The narrative recycles much of the biographical data about Zayṭa provided by Maḥfūẓ, explaining how he was the son of professional beggars, and how he was once a make-up artist with a travelling circus. It also describes how his early life was marked by extreme poverty, grotesque filth, and exclusion and isolation from any "normal" or legitimate social group. Al-Shārūnī synthesises much of the information Maḥfūẓ gives about Zayṭa's childhood into the following passage:

> Ẓayṭa was raised in dirt and lived in dirt. His mother used to leave him to crawl freely, grazing among the garbage and insects, savouring the mud and

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[65] Yūsuf al-Shārūnī, personal interview, 1 April 1996.
[66] Maḥfūẓ, op. cit., p. 71.

> exploring among the footprints. Scraps of parsley, tomato skin, vermin floating in stagnant water: this was his beautiful, singular world. He felt delighted to be caked in mud, something which others pretended to fear, and sickened to even go near. [...] His loathsome smell ostracised him from people, and his filthiness spared him their curiosity and stares. They did not interact with him, nor he with them.[67]

As he does in "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū", al-Shārūnī augments or adds here to Maḥfūẓ's original story. First, he continues with and expands on the theme of the conflict between tradition and modernity, locating its impact once more within various levels of narrative reality, from the local to the global. Second, he sets out on an overtly ideological mission: to expose the gap between appearances and reality in Egyptian society, especially within the context of its moral codes and values.

The Self and the Other: Mutual Distance and Exclusion

One of the principal underlying themes of "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt" is that of the individual versus the collectivity, with Zayṭa, the narrative self, existing on the fringes of so-called "respectable" society. Huddled in the darkness of his squalid little den, from where he performs his grisly rituals of maiming and dismemberment, Zayṭa is perceived by those around him as a subhuman, diabolical creature. Defined by all that is considered socially harmful or undesirable — namely filth, cruelty, immorality and wickedness — he strikes terror and revulsion into all those who encounter him. His other is society at large, at the centre of which is the hegemonic other, model of propriety, arbiter of morals, and of all that is deemed socially appropriate or acceptable. With its controlling, centralising and socialising tendencies, the hegemonic other perceives Zayṭa's alien, and determinedly individualistic, lifestyle as a malign and destabilising threat to its existence. Thus, for the sake of the "common good", it denies him any legitimate social function or role.

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[67] "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt", pp. 52-53.

The relationship between the self and the other in this text is one of mutual distance and exclusion. Although an outcast, Zayṭa embraces his isolation, since it gives him the autonomy to create in his private world what he is denied in the public sphere: a *raison d'être*, and a meaningful sense of identity. He does not yearn to belong to the world of the other, indeed, he loathes and rejects its hypocrisies and affectations. Therefore, he structures his own parallel universe, which subverts the norms of the society around him, and overturns its institutions and moral and ethical codes. It is a sort of hell on earth, or nocturnal underworld, which he populates with his cripples and other creations, and which he rules over with autocratic rigour and efficiency. In many ways, Zayṭa's world competes directly with the world of the other, even to the point of having its own counter-hegemonic institutions, such as a revenue service, by which Zayṭa levies "taxes" from his creations, once they have begun to earn an income.

Zayṭa is a complex and occasionally self-contradictory character, which is evidence of his humanity, in spite of his gruesome profession. For, although he relishes and profits from his ostracised status, he also shows signs of self-loathing and alienation, conditions typical of most of al-Shārūnī's characters during this period. Such self-loathing stems from Zayṭa's bitterness and rage, at how poverty and social injustice have degraded and debased him. Furthermore, it makes him long to take revenge on those more fortunate than himself. As the narrator reminds us: "We are not claiming that he chose this type of occupation out of compassion for humanity or benevolence towards it. What made him accept to choose it was this hidden need for cruelty, in a society so merciless it had made him taste dirt."[68] Yet, while Zayṭa's exile from society is to a great extent self-imposed, there is also evidence that he longs for communion with, and to feel "needed" by, the other, a fact most vividly illustrated in his unrequited desire for Ḥusniyya the baker:

> Zayṭa hoped she would need him one day, as many others did. He had tried to seduce her on more than one occasion, and his head was filled with feverish fantasies, but he met only with cruelty and rebukes from her. Ḥusniyya was in no need of a cripple-maker to ruin her marriage for her, for she had all she needed in this life, and did not need his help.[69]

Zayṭa confronts his own pain by inflicting pain on others, and by forcing polite society to face the unpleasant reality of his creations. According to Moosa: "His desire to hurt other people apparently gives him a sense of being, an identity."[70] Inasmuch as his creations are essential to the construction of his own sense of self, Zayṭa is also crucial to the construction of the identities of those he cripples. For, by virtue of his skills, they are able to transcend their poverty, exclusion or disenfranchisement, and redefine their identities by reconstructing themselves bodily. As Anthony Giddens notes:

> The body is an object in which we are all privileged, or doomed, to dwell. [...] It is not just a physical entity which we "possess", it is an action-system, a mode of praxis, and its practical immersion in the interactions of day-to-day life is an essential part of the sustaining of a coherent sense of self-identity.[71]

By avoiding the public realm and limiting his activities to the hours of night, Zayṭa escapes the moral judgements and intrusions of the other. He feels no guilt at his profession, and considers his actions as not only self-serving, but also altruistic. The narrator is wholly supportive of this, arguing: "His concern, like that of every great creator, was to satisfy a specific need while satisfying a general need. In this way, he earned a living while creating a way of life for others."[72] In fact, al-Shārūnī's short story supports the view that Zayṭa's activities are largely philanthropic, on the grounds that his creations provide roles and services for those who fall outside the institutions

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[68] Ibid., p. 55.
[69] Ibid., p. 56.
[70] Moosa, op. cit., p. 100.
[71] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 99.
[72] "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt", p. 55.

and bureaucracies of the state. From the perspective of the hegemonic other, meanwhile, Zayṭa's project is perverse, anarchic and vile.

The Dialogue Between Maḥfūẓ and al-Shārūnī (2)

Again, one of the most striking distinctions between the story of Zayṭa as it appears in the texts of al-Shārūnī and Maḥfūẓ, lies in the type of narration. Once more, al-Shārūnī employs a first-person narrator, who delivers a long, impassioned monologue, which has shades of the type of speech that might be given at a funeral or a memorial service. There are many similarities between this narrator and that of "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū", and we may even go so far as to suggest that both texts feature *the same* confrontational, and often controversial, narrative voice. If anything, the narrator of "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt" is even more passionate in his address; his support and sympathy for Zayṭa, whom he champions as a craftsman, a philanthropist and saviour, having an intensity which borders at times on religious zeal:

> Zayṭa died in prison a few days ago. I thought of putting in a request to the relevant authorities, demanding that they make a statue of him and erect it at the top of Midaq Alley. I hoped that Their Excellencies would make every distinction between that "extra" work, for which he was imprisoned and punished, and this heroic work, on which his life depended. I hoped that they would understand how wonderful is the meaning of disability, which he — with his intuition and genius — understood, and how only he could face up to a blaring, tumultuous city, and attend devotedly to its urgent and very necessary need.[73]

A second distinction between the two texts lies in the way each author presents Zayṭa's character. According to Moosa, in *Zuqāq al-Midaqq*, Zayṭa is a morbid, melancholic and sadistic character, "utterly devoid of human feeling or values", to whom Maḥfūẓ gives a "repugnant role".[74] Furthermore, Moosa states that Zayṭa is "an isolated character who has lost touch with humanity and has no sympathy for

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[73] Ibid., pp. 51-52.
[74] Moosa, op. cit., p. 99.

others".[75] By contrast, al-Shārūnī's text is at odds with Moosa's view, elevating Zayṭa to the level of local hero and miracle-worker, and arguing that the role he plays is both positive and vital. Further, al-Shārūnī presents Zayṭa as having a very highly-developed sense of humanity, his cruelty to others masking a deep-rooted desire to belong, and to benefit those on whom society has turned its back. He achieves this by turning morality (as we understand it) on its head: all pre-given "truths", traditional wisdoms and values are reversed, so that Zayṭa's dark, malevolent world becomes one of enlightenment and charity, and his filthiness and viciousness translate into purity and acts of compassion. Further, in al-Shārūnī's text, society is no longer seen to set the standards of propriety and ethics, but to be amoral, materialistic, uncaring and hypocritical.

Like *Zuqāq al-Midaqq*, "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt" speaks out against social injustice in Egypt, but has a far more subversive ideological discourse. This is filtered through the rationalising voice of the narrator, who denies that Zayṭa is a menace to society, and argues that he makes cripples just as "'Amm Kāmil makes *basbūsa* and Ḥusniyya the baker and her husband Ja'da make bread".[76] As such, he provides a valuable social service, while profiting personally from his enterprise. Meanwhile, for those who wish to earn a living by begging, Zayṭa supplies a product which generates income and raises self-esteem. As the narrator explains:

> They would come to him healthy, their health an impediment, just as morals impede an idealistic young man. They would stretch out their hands and the people would send them back empty; they would demand their rights in life and the others would refuse them. So they would come to Zayṭa, and would leave him blind, paralysed, hunchbacked, lame, [or] with broken arms or legs. In this way, Zayṭa would grant them their rights in life, and would exonerate them by making them qualified for their profession.[77]

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[75] Ibid., p. 99. I should stress that I do not agree wholeheartedly with this, and would argue that the discourse of Maḥfūẓ's novel is never entirely lacking in sympathy for Zayṭa.

[76] "Ẓayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt", p. 51.

[77] Ibid., p. 54-55.

Lastly, for those able-bodied citizens who offer their hard-earned wages in alms, Zayṭa's beggars come with a guarantee of quality and value for money:

> Whenever they found one of them to be of sound health and body, with a light in his eyes, articulate and plump, they would look away, as a company head or factory owner would with an unqualified job applicant. They were practical people, willing only to part with their money if the disfigurements attracted them, not wishing to squander it on the undeserving. Before giving them part of what they spent on their girlfriends, they wanted blindness, lameness and imbecility ... [78]

The narrator's apologia for Zayṭa and his profession goes even further: by contrasting Zayṭa's skilful, pragmatic cripple-making with the wanton destruction arising from the war, he insists that Zayṭa's craft is a thoroughly moral, and even nationalistic, endeavour: "Our society's need to create disfigurement is both urgent and necessary. Some of this is destructive disfigurement, such as that which wars and raids create for us, and some of it is creative disfigurement, such as that which Zayṭa used to create."[79] Perhaps the most significant indicator of Zayṭa's status is when the narrator presents him as a Christ-like figure:

> And two thousand years ago, Christ came into the world. And that holy man went forth, curing the sick, the blind and the lame, thereby giving them new life, and so he was called the miracle-maker. And in the twentieth century, Zayṭa came into this world, creating the sick, the blind and the lame, thereby giving them new life, and so he was called the cripple-maker. And it may come to pass that the day will come when his picture becomes widespread in bedrooms and places of worship, and statues of him are sold in the shops and on saints' days, and books are written about his deeds and his life.[80]

As well as sharing the same narrative voice and subversive narrative ethos, "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt" has many other features in common with "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū". Notably, both texts allude to the many local and global manifestations of modernity, although in "Ẓayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt" these have far more absurd and even apocalyptic undertones, reflecting the general state of chaos and uncertainties of the era. We see

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[78] Ibid., p. 54.
[79] Ibid., p. 57.

examples of this in the way the narrator juxtaposes images revealing the gravity of warfare with those showing the frivolity of the beauty industry, and in the way he discusses details of Zayṭa's artificial disfigurements alongside reports of babies being born with bizarre and hideous birth defects. Capitalism is also a prominent theme shared by both texts; even Zayṭa's cripple-making project is a form of capitalistic production, competing favourably with the newly-developing industries of the war years.

A last theme concerns the control and construction of the body, which, as we shall discover, recurs frequently in al-Shārūnī's short stories. According to the narrator:

> In the elegant parts of the city, the beauty industry had spread, making the fat thin and the thin fat, removing hair and acne, making bottoms stick out and breasts shapely. And salons spread where wrinkled ears could be evened out, flabbiness reduced, crooked noses straightened and thick lips made thin, and where youth could be returned to "silver-haired, upper-class women".[81]

Thus, just as the beauty industry addresses the narcissistic needs of the wealthy and privileged, Zayṭa's service aims to rectify the disadvantages of the poor and alienated. In his view, the creating of a cripple from a healthy, but otherwise impoverished, citizen is as legitimate a means of "allowing the individual to attain his existence in society as [...] the prostitute's beauty, the student's qualifications, the politician's hypocrisy, and titles and riches".[82]

Like "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū", "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt" has also been criticised for lending little to Maḥfūẓ's original story, in spite of the changes and new perspectives it introduces. Critics such as al-'Intīl appear to disregard al-Shārūnī's attempts to explore the interiority of Zayṭa's character, complaining: "Having had Najīb Maḥfūẓ present Zayṭa to us as a proud, strong, but deprived man, we do not need Yūsuf to tell us for

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[80] Ibid., p. 58.
[81] Ibid., p. 53.

example that 'Zayṭa had his animalistic dreams, just as you and I do'."[83] While it is true that al-Shārūnī's text owes its very existence to *Zuqāq al-Midaqq*, I would argue nonetheless that it contains much that sets it apart from Maḥfūẓ's novel, and much that distinguishes it as an innovative piece of narrative. Perhaps its most interesting feature is its comparative element, which, as we have seen, lends a multi-dimensional perspective to the text and reveals the interconnectedness between the general and the specific, the individual and the universal. Consider, for example, the story's opening paragraph, in which the narrator compares the different forms of "creation":

> Make, made, maker. The factory makes cars and the factories make bombs —for they are industry, and these are products. 'Amm Kāmil makes *basbūsa* and Ḥusniyya the baker and her husband Ja'da make bread. Umm Ḥamīda the matchmaker used to make families, Christ made miracles, and Zayṭa made cripples.[84]

By grouping Zayṭa's creations alongside Christ's miracles in this way, the narrator implies that this form of "creation" is far less abhorrent than the making of bombs, and is as fundamental to human existence as the making of bread, or families. In short, the narrator challenges the reader to think in this text, and to re-assess established and accepted "norms" and "truths", such as the inherently unstable binarisms of good and evil, right and wrong. Thus, while Moosa states that, in *Zuqāq al-Midaqq*, Zayṭa "serves to personify the social conditions that reduce people to desperation, deprive them of human dignity, and force them to accept beggary",[85] I would argue that, in this text, Zayṭa is a symbol for Egypt's poor and disenfranchised, fighting against the corrupt, destructive tendencies of the other.

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[82] Ibid., p. 56.

[83] Al-'Intīl, op. cit., p. 128. It is unclear why al-'Intīl should find this comment objectionable, however, since Maḥfūẓ's novel is equally frank in its portrayal of Zayṭa's sexuality.

[84] "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt", p. 51.

4. "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis" ("A Robbery on the Sixth Floor"), 1950

Both "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū" and "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt" introduce two character prototypes: the Christ-like saviour, and what we might loosely call "the misfit". Of these, the misfit is the most significant, and may be seen to apply in some degree to almost all of al-Shārūnī's main characters. Among the stories al-Shārūnī produced during this period, we find a variety of misfits, many of whom are ostracised from society because they are perceived to be in some way defective or deficient. Examples include Līzā, the ageing, pockmarked virgin of "Jasad min Ṭīn"; Zayn, the bald, down-trodden peasant girl of "al-Mu'adhdhabūn fi'l-Arḍ" ("The Wretched of the Earth"),[86] and, of course, Zayṭa, Midaq Alley's filthy outcast. Others, such as the mysterious stranger in "al-'Awda min al-Manfā" ("The Return from Exile"),[87] or Muḥammad Afandī 'Ajūr, the downtrodden civil servant in "al-Ṭarīq" ("The Road"),[88] and even 'Abbās al-Ḥilū, are misfits in the sense that they feel caught between two eras or worlds and, as such, between two forms of identity. Out of all of these characters, however, it is Sayyid Afandī 'Āmir, the protagonist of "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis", who is most representative of the misfit prototype during this period.

Sayyid Afandī 'Āmir is a primary school teacher and aspiring artist. After his sweetheart leaves him for another man, he becomes a recluse, shunning all but the most essential of human contact. Locked in his rented room on the roof of a block of flats, he busies himself with trying to recreate the image of his former girlfriend, first through drawing, then through painting and, finally, through sculpture. Then, one

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[85] Moosa, op. cit., p. 99.

[86] First published in *al-Adīb*, January 1948. Reprinted in *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, pp. 108-114. Also republished under the title "Zayn" ("Zayn") in *al-Majmū'āt al-Qiṣaṣiyya al-Kāmila* (hereafter cited as *al-Majmū'āt*), vol. 1, pp. 133-140. As al-Shārūnī explains: "The [original] title was derived at that time from a collection of short stories published by Ṭaha Ḥusayn, to whom my story was dedicated." Yūsuf al-Shārūnī, personal interview, 12 September 1998.

[87] First published in *al-Adīb*, October 1948. Reprinted in *al-Ziḥām*, pp. 119-124.

Sunday, his world is rudely upturned by a mysterious and life-transforming incident: he is burgled, the thief or thieves stealing only his clothes and shoes. The changes effected by this robbery are remarkable: first, Sayyid Afandī 'Āmir is astonished — if not alarmed — to find himself the object of the attentions of neighbours and colleagues with whom he had never previously had any contact. Second, he finds that this violation of his private space has in fact robbed him of the things to which he clung for his survival, namely his privacy and his individuality. As a result, this much-mocked outsider whom society once shunned, now finds that he has been unwittingly drawn back under its influence and control.

Unlike other texts from this period, "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis" tells us less about the historical or socio-political context than it does about universal themes in human nature. Through the voice of a subtly ironic narrator, it reveals how humans are inclined to feed on and find comfort in the problems and misfortunes of others. The text also demonstrates how societies instinctively fear and mistrust the perceptibly "different". Lastly, the text uses various examples to illustrate how humans prey on those weaker than themselves, in order to create or perpetuate feelings of power.

The Self and the Other: Willed Exclusion, Forced Inclusion

The narrative self of this text is Sayyid Afandī 'Āmir, who may be seen to share certain characteristics with his predecessor, Zayṭa. He too exists on the fringes of social activity, his mild eccentrisms and amusing mannerisms causing people to mock, deride or despise him. Further, although he is fundamentally harmless, there are nonetheless those who seem to fear or feel uncomfortable with him. Like Zayṭa, Sayyid Afandī also accepts unquestioningly and even embraces his social ostracism, finding comfort and autonomy in his egocentric universe. To illustrate, see the narrator's description of the dynamic between Sayyid Afandī and his colleagues:

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[88] First published in *al-Bashīr*, Cairo, October 1948. Reprinted in *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, pp. 91-99.

> He withdrew from them and they from him, harbouring something resembling dislike towards him, because he was busy with himself rather than listening to them, appreciating their personalities and praising their work. They satisfied themselves with what amounted to a feud, whispering remarks about the way he wore his fez, and how it almost came down to his ears as though he were one of those Pashas from the nineteenth-century, and about the fact that he was always sleepy between classes — and even in the classroom itself, in front of his pupils — and about his way of walking, which was almost mechanical, especially when you see him coming with his arms moving at his side, like one of those wooden children's toys ... [89]

His neighbours are equally disdainful towards him; despite "befriending" him after the robbery, the narrator notes of one neighbour: "Whenever he saw Sayyid Afandī 'Āmir going up and down the stairs like a stupid goose, he would not even hide the smile which flickered about his lips."[90] Yet, it should be noted that, inasmuch as Sayyid Afandī is excluded by others, he clearly accepts and even wills this exclusion, thus his non-conformity is perceived as anti-conformity.

There are numerous others in this text, categorised broadly along the lines that those who are not with Sayyid Afandī are necessarily against him. In this way, his many others include his former girlfriend, his Italian neighbour Gloria, his boss, and — in short — the whole of society. Sayyid Afandī's relationship to the other is marked predominantly by fear: he perceives the other as powerful yet predatory, alluring yet appalling, overt yet opaque, all-knowing yet unknowable. This condition is expressed most visibly in his attitude towards women; as the narrator explains: "He did not know women, nor how to love or make love to them. Rather, he feared them and feared society, [which was] filled with their scent and their eyes."[91] Two types of female other are represented in the text, which might be seen to be two dimensions to the same female other. First is the woman as sacred goddess, or object of pure and spiritual love, reflected in the idol Sayyid Afandī sculpts of his former girlfriend. He would

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[89] "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis", p. 33.
[90] Ibid., p. 35.
[91] Ibid., p. 38.

murmur this woman's name "the way the Believer murmurs his prayers",[92] inspired by the memory of their relationship, "which continued to nourish him with feelings of adoration and fear, holiness and sin".[93] As the narrator observes:

> It was as though all of his capacity for spiritual feelings had turned towards her. He sought inspiration from her in the decisions he was about to take, and consulted her on things happening to him. He devoted all of the powers of mysticism in his soul to her, to the point where he felt that his life today was nothing more than an never-ending path towards her, and a persistent effort to attain her over again.[94]

Second is the female as sex object or seductress, represented by Gloria, Sayyid Afandī's Italian neighbour. "A young woman of remarkable beauty",[95] she also possesses great sexual power. Sayyid Afandī notes that "whenever her firmly-built, polished, white body came into touch with him, he felt something in the way of submissiveness before it".[96] It is clear that Gloria is conscious of her power, for she uses it as a means of manipulating Sayyid Afandī, thereby bolstering her feelings of authority and self-importance. At one point, she even challenges him to seduce her, which she rationalises as follows:

> It seems she realised what kind of feelings she aroused in him, and thought for a moment that she could have some fun with him, tormenting him for a little while, and then leaving him. Besides, her nature justified it [on the grounds that] she would be doing a noble deed by trying to draw this man out of his wooden disposition.[97]

Although Sayyid Afandī makes advances towards Gloria, he is quickly unnerved and pulls away from her. She resents this, and, before he can regather his confidence, she decides "that he should not touch her again, and that she should not expose her body to

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[92] Ibid., p. 32.
[93] Ibid., p. 37.
[94] Ibid., p. 33.
[95] Ibid., p. 34.
[96] Ibid., p. 35.
[97] Ibid., p. 42.

him another time. She felt her control over him, and felt a tremendous sense of exultation at this."[98]

In the cases of both women, the element of fear is extremely strong. With Sayyid Afandī's former girlfriend, this fear is based on a reverential awe, and a sense of dread at the prospect of his memories of her fading. With Gloria, his fear stems from her very tangible physical and sensual power; above all, he fears her rejection and ridicule, both of which he (inevitably) falls victim to. We can sense the fear Gloria generates in Sayyid Afandī in the narrator's description of him as "a dwarf, shrinking before her giant, libidinous body".[99] Furthermore, both women are ultimately unattainable: be it in the context of the cold, lifeless statue of his sweetheart, or the warm, live flesh of Gloria, Sayyid Afandī never succeeds in attaining "the woman herself, but merely her general features".[100]

As the incident with Gloria demonstrates, there is a clear tension, or power struggle, between the narrative self and the other. The self is at the whims of, is controlled by, and is manipulated by the other, and is first expelled from the other's domain, then brought back into it against its volition. As we find with 'Abbās al-Ḥilū, the self constructs itself by observing everyday routines, which, while often banal, give a semblance of meaning and order to his life:

> As usual, he climbed the ninety steps of the stairs, and glanced at the stout Italian woman standing in front of her door on the fifth floor. As he was about to pass her, on his way to his room on the roof (or "sixth floor", as he liked to call it), she had just turned away a salesman with a basket on his head, and was starting to close her door. He passed her in silence, for he had never greeted her, nor she him, since this building had brought them together. When he arrived in front of his room, he stopped a short while for his sweat to dry off. Then he began to search in his pockets with one of his hands. He always began with the left-hand pocket. Then he used both hands, thinking quickly,

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[98] Ibid., p. 43.
[99] Ibid., p. 43.
[100] Ibid., p. 46.

> as though of nothing, until he came to the inside pocket and felt the hardness of the key.[101]

Sayyid Afandī also constructs himself through his artistic endeavours, as the narrator explains:

> No-one could comprehend that this constant dreamer[102] could busy himself with drawing and sculpting, though this is neither exceptional nor unusual, for I know a merchant who is so keen on drawing, for example, that when I saw his pictures I thought they had been stolen from one of the world's museums. I also know another, a postal worker in one of the villages, who, as soon as he is finished with his working day, devotes himself to making wonderful clay statues. Thus it is not unlikely that Sayyid Afandī 'Āmir is one of those for whom art fulfils their [most] personal and essential needs, for it makes them feel that they have a private life beyond their general, routine, daily work, in which they rent their lives to others for the sake of a salary with which they can eat, drink and raise children. They do not aspire to fame or the admiration of the masses, rather, art for them is simply [a way of] feeling capable of communication, expression and innovation.[103]

For Sayyid Afandī, art is also a means of shaking off the artificiality of his socially-constructed identity, and of expressing a more authentic, individual sense of self. This "losing" and refinding of the self is also mirrored in the many parallels the narrator draws between the stages of artistic creation and the rituals of Sufi worship.

While the self appears to dread and even despise human contact, there is evidence that it also desires to know the other, and to commune with it, but is prevented from doing so by feelings of inadequacy and under-confidence. The self's solitude is a carapace behind which it can protect itself, yet it is also a source of melancholy, bitterness and ennui. Thus the self skirts around making human contact, as we see when Sayyid Afandī visits his favourite café, where he takes vicarious pleasure in watching others enjoy themselves:

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[101] Ibid., p. 32.

[102] A description also given to the character 'Amm Kāmil in "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū".

[103] "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis", p. 33-34.

> In the café was his temporary salvation. His need for it was revived with the coming of each new day and the fresh melancholy it would bring, which weighed ever heavily down on him. As night fell, this melancholy would crystallise in his soul and overwhelm him, and his room would drive him out to that noisy, crowded place, where he would retire contentedly, watching the others, sipping his coffee and thinking a mixture of terrible, wonderful [thoughts].[104]

Significantly, it is in the café that Sayyid Afandī expresses his fear of "losing himself in the midst of this crowd",[105] an image which will be shown in due course to be one of the most prominent in al-Shārūnī's short stories.

As for the other, it pretends to show concern and pity for Sayyid Afandī, and does not hesitate to offer help or advice. Meanwhile, it also feeds gleefully and selfishly on his misfortune, while forcing him to feel responsibility towards it:

> Sayyid Afandī longed now to return as quickly as he could to his room and sleep, but he realised that they did not want the matter to pass without an uproar ... Four, five, then six more came, whom Sayyid Afandī recognised but whose names or occupations he did not know. And now they were all at his service: one of them told him about the necessity of using his legal rights — this must be a lawyer — while another told him about the need to punish the thief, so that he would not dare to break into the house a second time — perhaps this was one of those who fear for their possessions and themselves. And now the matter of defending these people was in Sayyid Afandī's hands.[106]

Long used to perceiving himself as an object of others' ridicule, Sayyid Afandī is both surprised and rather flattered at his neighbours' claims of concern and, unlike the narrator, is not fully susceptible to their concealed motivations. Hence, when Gloria's mother offers to lend him some of her husband's clothes, he is filled with a "confused feeling, somewhere between pride, martyrdom and gratitude at being associated with

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[104] Ibid., p. 38.
[105] Ibid., pp. 38-39.
[106] Ibid., p. 35.

such decent, generous people. Although he preferred not to get involved with them".[107]

As with the other protagonists in this chapter, Sayyid Afandī has a conscious sense of self, but this is in the process of being eroded, undermined or overturned, causing feelings of inadequacy and incompleteness. It should also be noted that Sayyid Afandī shares the common trait of having a sense of self that has been fixed and determined by and in the past,[108] and that many of his conflicts stem from his inability to reconcile this with the changing realities of his present.

Anti-Colonial Ideology and the Threat of the Individual

"Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis" features an undramatised narrator, who narrates largely in the third person, but breaks frame on one occasion to use the first-person "I" (see note 103 above). The narrator sets a tragi-comic-ironic tone from the text's beginning, insisting casually that the burglar "may not really have wanted to do this of all robberies",[109] and going on to describe it as "accidental". This immediately establishes Sayyid Afandī's inferior status: even burglars, it would seem, do not really deem him worth stealing from. The narrator also comments that no serious search has ever been conducted for the thief, hinting either at the authorities' negligence, or their lack of interest in such an "insignificant" case. Unlike in "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū" and "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt", the narrator's attitude towards Sayyid Afandī is never stated overtly; inasmuch as he expresses no discernible sympathy for him, nor does he express any open hostility. What is clearer is the narrator's antipathy towards society; through subtle irony he exposes its artifice and maliciousness, and makes disparaging allusions to so-called social "standards".

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[107] Ibid., p. 37.

[108] The narrator notes that by the time Sayyid Afandī went to work as a teacher "the manner of his private life had been decreed", suggesting an unwillingness or inability to evolve on his part. Ibid., p. 33.

[109] Ibid., p. 32.

For the greater part, the narrator's language is coolly formal and denotative, yet there are times when it is highly poetic, particularly in passages where he uses tropes and figures to reflect Sayyid Afandī's various emotional states. One well-explored device is defamiliarisation, which, of all the short stories in this chapter, is used most extensively here.[110] While some of these tropes and figures are more effectively employed than others, they reflect al-Shārūnī's early interest in stylistic experimentation. Consider the following:

> The café where Sayyid Afandī 'Āmir sat was a very elongated, very low place, like a nightmare. Those who sat in and around it were scattered loosely about, like the remnants of the roots of an enormous, severed tree.[111]
>
> He glanced at his face repeatedly, two or three times, and found it yellow and very pale, his eyes almost hollow and his cheekbones protruding, as though on the verge of leaving it.[112]
>
> He found himself walking with the messenger boy in a district with a peculiar air about it, for the houses kept getting higher and higher, while the roads kept getting narrower and narrower, like the furrows dug by the nails of a madman.[113]

There are two ideological elements to the narrative discourse. First is its anti-colonial message, as expressed in the tensions between Sayyid Afandī 'Āmir and the text's foreign, or European, characters.[114] The central European character is the beautiful Gloria, whose exotic appeal lies in her "polished, white body",[115] and her "delightful, foreign, faltering"[116] way of speaking. Yet Gloria is also a woman of questionable virtue, and it is surely no coincidence that, on the moral level at least, she

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[110] Another text which experiments with the defamiliarisation device is "al-'Awda min al-Manfā", although I would argue that, on the whole, it limits itself to more easily accessible symbols and metaphors.

[111] "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis", p. 38.

[112] Ibid., p. 39.

[113] Ibid., p. 48.

[114] After "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū", this is the last of al-Shārūnī's texts until 1976-7 to feature Western characters, perhaps reflecting the fact that, by 1953, most Europeans had left Egypt, and that the national political discourse during Nasser's presidency was dominated by nationalist and pan-Arab ideology.

[115] "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis", p. 35.

[116] Ibid., p. 35.

is the opposite of her Egyptian counterpart, whom Sayyid Afandī represents as a religious icon. Another minor "foreign" character in the text is the pawnbroker, whose presence appears to reflect the fact that many of Egypt's financial services at this time were under European (or Jewish) control.

The anticolonial struggle is represented in the stand-off between Sayyid Afandī and Gloria, when she exploits her sexuality in order to torture and oppress him. As a metonymic symbol for the colonial powers, Gloria emasculates Sayyid Afandī, using her erotic strengths to sap him of the ability to defend himself. Duly humiliated, he is:

> [...] seized by a satanic desire ... to hit her. To hit this plump, tender body in a rough and pleasurable way. For some hidden reason, he was certain that she would relinquish her resistance, that she would enjoy his smacks, and throw herself down before him this time. But he did not advance, as though something abominable was paralysing him, and obscuring the curves of her body from him. He wanted to be victorious, but feared defeat.[117]

Unusually, this text inverts the conventional, gendered cultural hegemony paradigm of the colonised character as passive and female, and the colonising character as active and male.

The second ideological message in the discourse lies in the narrator's exposé of contemporary society, when individualism was perceived as deviance, and therefore brought swiftly under the control of the collectivity. By the end of the text, the narrator reveals how all of the former routines and certainties of Sayyid Afandī's life have been reversed, and how he has been drawn back definitively into the socialising fold of the other:

> He went to his room and tried vainly to sleep. So he got up and left his room, although this was something he does not usually do at this time of day ... On the stairs he met the Italian lady with her daughter, and smiled at them. Then

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[117] Ibid., p. 43.

> he met the senior official, accompanied by one of the residents, and he greeted them, too. When he reached the doorman, he returned his greeting.[118]

In a second example, the narrator illustrates the devastating impact the robbery has had on Sayyid Afandī, who is so desperate to find the thief, that he looks at all the people who pass him by, to see whether they are wearing his stolen clothes or shoes. As a result:

> He became bound to the whole city, and suddenly every person became important to him! He began to scrutinise the people as they came and went, sat down on the floor or in the cafés, or looked down from their balconies, as though there was something that belonged to him in every house and behind every window.[119]

In accordance with the above reading, "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis" is not merely the tale of an "accidental robbery ". For, besides being an intrusion into Sayyid Afandī's private world, this robbery is also a wilful violation of all he has done to make his identity distinct. It is also noteworthy that the burglar steals only Sayyid Afandī's clothes and shoes, since this ensures that, as a result, he is at his most vulnerable and exposed, and is most susceptible to schemes to "reclothe", or redefine, him. Thus, while the perpetrator of the robbery is never identified formally, we may assume that it is the work of the hegemonic other.

Conclusion

In this first chapter, the Egyptian nation is shown in its early stages of modernisation. Notably, all four texts are characterised by a loss of certainty and ontological ground, at a time when values and identities were no longer seen to be reliable or knowable. The themes of science, industrialisation and capitalism are prominent, as we see in "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū" and "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt", while society is marked in all texts by an oppressive and often hypocritical moralism. Due to growing exposure to

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[118] Ibid., p. 50.
[119] Ibid., p. 50.

other cultures and different world-views (particularly the culture and world-views of the coloniser), local culture appears to be losing its bearings and centre, while "traditional" values are collapsing, or are seen to be irrelevant. In particular, traditional communities or collectivities are losing ground to the growing primacy of the individual, as we see most visibly in "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū". As a result, narrative paradigms are shifting from a closed, finite world to an open, changing, layered and often alien universe. In texts such as "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis", we also see a shift towards the mystical and symbolic, as a means of recovering a sense of the sacred and recreating a sustainable ontological ground.

The narrative self during this period tends to withdraw from, rather than confront, the social and symbolic order. Among the types of self we find are the powerless, emasculated "little man" ('Abbās al-Ḥilū, Sayyid Afandī 'Āmir); the Christ-like figure or saviour ('Abbās al-Ḥilū, Zayṭa); and the misfit (all four protagonists). Notably, all selves express existential angst, fear and self-loathing to various degrees. At this stage in the development of the dynamic narrative self, it may be seen to have an emergent sense of identity, and to be trying to forge or establish its own personal sense of selfhood. Yet, as it attempts to reconcile or negotiate between various criteria for identification, it finds its attempts are thwarted or undermined by the other, forcing it into exile or exclusion. Although lacking in confidence, the self is focused on taking control of its present, thus there is an emphasis on survival and the human instincts, especially the sex instinct. As such, the self is not yet in the ideal position to create a coherent form of self-consciousness.

To a certain extent, the self desires the other at this stage, despite recognising that the other is potentially harmful, and that they are ultimately incompatible. Thus we find a series of ill-fated relationships between characters, such as those between Līzā and Muḥyī, 'Abbas al-Ḥilū and Ḥamīda, Ḥamīda and Faraj Ibrāhīm, and Sayyid Afandī

'Āmir and Gloria. The relationship of the narrative self to the other may be summarised in the following table:

SELF	OTHER
Under-confidence and humility	Confidence and arrogance
Fear and self-loathing	Daring and self-assurance
Exclusion from society	Involvement in society
Scapegoat and victim	Aggressor and tormentor
Caught between past and present	Established in present, future-oriented
Incoherent sense of identity	Coherent sense of identity
Passive	Active
Dependent	Independent

Chapter Two

The Self, the Other and the Desire for a New Reality

This chapter covers the period from August 1950, when al-Shārūnī published his short story "al-Qayẓ" ("The Heatwave"),[1] to February 1952, the date of his last publication before the July 1952 coup, "Difā' Muntaṣaf al-Layl" ("A Midnight Defence").[2] Although spanning less than two years, the period within which this chapter is located was one of the most turbulent and significant in Egypt's modern history, dominated as it was by the rise of the popular patriotic and democratic movement, which set the scene for the final overthrowing of the *ancien régime*. Four stories from this period will be analysed here: "al-Qayẓ"; "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa" ("The Five Lovers");[3] "Risāla ilā Imra'a" ("A Letter to a Woman");[4] and "al-Ḥidhā'" ("The Shoes").[5]

Egypt in the Pre-Revolutionary Period

From 1950 onwards, the popular patriotic and democratic movement in Egypt gained in size and strength. A major factor was the Palestine war of 1948, which dealt a blow to national pride and exposed the shortcomings of the Egyptian state apparatus. Among those who felt the defeat most keenly were the military, whose loyalties to the palace were tested sorely by their experience. As a result, a new political force emerged: the Free Officers, a secret nationalist organisation which rose within the ranks of the regular army. Largely of middle- and lower-middle-class origin, the Free Officers set

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[1] First published in *al-Adīb*, Beirut, August 1950. Reprinted in *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, pp. 84-90.

[2] First published in *al-Adīb*, Beirut, February 1952. Reprinted in *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, pp. 115-132. The story's title was changed in 1973 to "Muṭāradat Muntaṣaf al-Layl" ("A Midnight Pursuit"), when it appeared in the reformatted collection of the same name.

[3] First published under the title "Ayyām al-Ru'b" ("Days of Terror"), in *al-Adīb*, Beirut, September 1950. Retitled "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa" ("The Five Lovers") in *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, pp. 5-13.

[4] First published under the title "Risālatān: Min Najwā wa ilā Najwā" ("Two Letters: From Najwā and to Najwā "), in *al-Adīb*, Beirut, March 1951. Retitled "Risāla ilā Imra'a" in *Risāla ilā Imra'a*, pp. 46-59.

as their main objectives the evacuation of the British and the overthrowing of the monarchy. They also began to visualise various programmes of reform, for the army, the state structure, the economy and the agrarian system. As Mahmoud Hussein explains: "The army's projected role was thus both political and ideological — to restore cohesion and authority to the state and to infuse it with efficiency."[6]

In the new Anglo-Egyptian Treaty drawn up in 1951, Britain offered to withdraw its troops from Egypt by 1956. Egypt rejected these terms, and took the defiant step of abrogating the treaty. A state of emergency was proclaimed, and *Ikhwān* commando units began to launch attacks against the British along the Suez Canal. In January 1952, following an attack on the British garrison stationed at al-Tall al-Kabīr, the British killed more than fifty of the *Bulūk al-Niẓām*, an auxiliary police force sympathetic to the popular movement, at their barracks in Ismā'īliyya. Once news of this operation reached Cairo, the police force marched on the palace in protest, while labourers, students and civil servants met in a mass demonstration of unprecedented size. Meanwhile, angry mobs attacked properties associated with the imperialists, and set fire to department stores, cafés, casinos and foreign businesses. By the end of that day, over 750 establishments had been burned or destroyed, and eleven British and other foreigners had been killed.[7] King Fārūq was able to capitalise briefly on the mood, by overthrowing the governing Wafd party and imposing martial law, but it was not long before both the *Ikhwān* and the Free Officers had begun their own separate plots to seize power. While the former had the advantage of commanding huge support throughout Egypt, the latter had the advantage of being an integral part of the state apparatus.

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[5] First published in *al-Adīb*, Beirut, April 1951. Reprinted in *al-Ziḥām*, pp. 83-91.

[6] Mahmoud Hussein, *Class Conflict in Egypt 1945-1970*, trans. Michel and Susanna Chirman, Alfred Ehrenfeld and Kathy Brown (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 78.

[7] Hopwood, op. cit., p. 31.

On the cultural level, the revolutionary fervour and dynamism of this period found its expression in all areas of the arts, including painting and sculpture, music, criticism, the novel and, of course, the short story. Al-Shārūnī, for one, was enjoying what may now be seen to be the most prolific phase of his entire career, publishing five stories in 1950 and another five in 1951.[8] The impact of Egypt's political situation meant that short story writers began to infuse their texts with a new, rebellious spirit, although the conditions of censorship under which they worked meant that their criticisms were often couched in metaphors, symbols and ambiguity. Ontological fears and existentialist themes were pronounced, yet these were often denied direct expression in their narratives. Instead, writers began to draw on their earlier experiments with modernism and expressionism, probing deeper into the interior workings of their characters, and placing emphasis on the subconscious and the processes of perception. They also set about investigating the "essence" of human experience, and began to exaggerate and distort language, in an attempt to represent what they saw as the irrationality of their world.

It is significant that this experimentalist trend coincided with this volatile phase in Egypt's history, for, according to Ceza Kassem Draz: "The rejection of traditional forms implies the rejection of the society that produced these forms, and the aim of this rejection is to awaken the reader to a new reality, or, at least, to the necessity for a new reality."[9] In the analyses that follow, I look at examples of al-Shārūnī's experimentalism, and consider how these connect to the revolutionary mood in Egypt, which was itself a political expression of the desire for a new reality.

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[8] Only in 1992 did al-Shārūnī beat this record, when he published six stories. On average, he has published between one and two stories a year.

1. "Al-Qayẓ" ("The Heatwave"), 1950

In "al-Qayẓ" we encounter yet another of al-Shārūnī's character protoypes: the middle-class intellectual. There are undoubtedly more educated, middle-class protagonists in his stories than any other type of character, presumably reflecting his own socio-economic status and professional experience. As Ḥaqqī points out, al-Shārūnī "does not write about sectors of society that he is not familiar with",[10] albeit asserting that he has no specific middle-class prototype. Al-Shārūnī is recognised as a writer of wide learning and erudition, and critics such as al-'Intīl note that he "is an educated and culturally mature writer; his learning floats intentionally to the surface of the story, yet is also hidden in its folds, marking his style with a particular character".[11] As such, his learning has left its traces on his use of themes, settings and subject groups, and his characters are commonly academic professionals, students, or lovers of culture and the arts. We find such characters in even his earliest stories, among them Muḥyī the medical student in "Jasad min Ṭīn"; the teacher-narrator of "Zawjī" ("My Husband"),[12] Professor Qadrī the microbiologist in "al-Ṭarīq"; and Sayyid Afandī 'Āmir, the teacher and sculptor in "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis". It may even be argued that al-Shārūnī writes with an educated, middle-class audience in mind; in a 1993 interview he asserted: "Yes, I do feel that I am a writer for an elite and a minority."[13]

"Al-Qayẓ" is confined to twenty-four hours during a deadly heatwave in Cairo. It is focalised largely through its leading character, Maḥmūd, whom the narrator describes as "an intellectual",[14] but who appears to engage in no meaningful intellectual activity or employment. Rather, Maḥmūd is an inert malcontent, who attempts to give meaning

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[9] Ceza Kassem Draz, "Opaque and Transparent Discourse in Sonallah Ibrahim's Works", in *The View From Within: Writers and Critics on Contemporary Arabic Literature*, ed. Ferial J. Ghazoul and Barbara Harlow (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1994), p. 135.

[10] Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, "Yūsuf al-Shārūnī wa Risāla ilā Imra'a" ("Yūsuf al-Shārūnī and *A Letter to a Woman*"), in *Khuṭuwāt fi'l-Naqd* [*Steps in Criticism*], 2nd. ed. (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li'l-Kitāb, 1976), p. 224.

[11] Al-'Intīl, op. cit., p. 129.

[12] First published in *al-Fuṣūl*, Cairo, January 1947. Reprinted in *al-Majmū'āt*, vol. 1, pp. 203-209.

[13] Bayḍūn, op. cit. p. 17.

to his life by fabricating trivial problems, and by setting himself pointless challenges. As those about him struggle to cope with the heatwave, and to continue with the day-to-day realities of their lives, Maḥmūd contemplates issues such as his right to freedom, which he expresses by such futile gestures as trying to give up smoking (which he achieves for all of one hour), and setting conditions on his girlfriend (although he knows that she will not fulfil them). Absorbed in the trivialities of his so-called, "torn, depressed life",[15] Maḥmūd is blind to the terrible decisions and choices forced upon those less privileged than himself.

As with a great number of al-Shārūnī's short stories, "al-Qayẓ" is a discourse on the general state of degeneracy in Egyptian society. By singling out the bourgeoisie for its criticisms, it illustrates the moral and political apathy of this class during the pre-revolutionary period, many members of which were either working with the establishment or were reluctant to challenge it, in spite of (or perhaps because of) the political turbulence of the era. It also highlights the lack of engagement among many of Egypt's intellectuals, revealing how they applied their energies to abstract and generally unproductive ideas, rather than offering practical solutions to the country's social and political ills.[16] It should be stressed, however, that "al-Qayẓ" does not express a phenomenon specific to one group or class only, but speaks of a more general social malaise, rooted in an apathy stemming from a prevailing climate of fear and repression.

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[14] "Al-Qayẓ", p. 84.

[15] Ibid., p. 90.

[16] Ironically, with the flowering of the socialist realist trend shortly after the Egyptian revolution, such charges came to be levelled at al-Shārūnī himself. As Hafez and Cobham note: "He seems to have responded in a more inward-looking and cerebral way than many of his contemporaries to the troubles and changes experienced by his generation; as a result, many of his early works were overlooked during the 1950s when nationalist and socially conscious (quasi socialist realist) literature found more of a response." In *A Reader of Modern Arabic Short Stories*, op. cit., p. 46.

The Self and the Other: The Significance of Class

The narrative self of "al-Qayẓ" is Maḥmūd the "intellectual": bourgeois, conservative, idle and egocentric. He is a self-interested and self-serving character, and is defined by lethargy, introspection, narcissism and *ennui*, and an agenda utterly lacking in any moral or social imperative. Maḥmūd is a self of thought, rather than of action, and although he has a keen sense of self-consciousness, he appears to express no coherent notion of individual or collective identity. Like earlier characters, such as Līzā, 'Abbās al-Ḥilū and Sayyid Afandī 'Āmir, his sense of self is often fragile and subject to psychological pressures, but on the whole these are trivial, and are nearly always self-inflicted. In particular, he allows his petty existential anxieties to undermine the coherence of his sense of self, as a result of which he vacillates between over-inflated pride and despair. Initially, Maḥmūd appears to be a character of some complexity, yet in truth he is merely affected and contrary. He is also riddled with contradictions and inconsistencies: he frequently feels bored, alone and misunderstood, yet drives those who care about him away, due to his riddles and the various conditions he sets. Emotionally limited and ideologically uncommitted, Maḥmūd fails to acknowledge the burdens that weigh so heavily on his society, and appears to look at life with dispassionate abstraction.

There are two main others in this text, each of which will be considered here. The first of these is also called Maḥmūd, and will be called Maḥmūd (B) for the purposes of clarity. A working-class cigarette seller, Maḥmūd (B) appears to be Maḥmūd (A)'s other in almost every sense, and there is visibly much socio-economic, intellectual and cultural distance between them. Their class distinctions are especially pronounced; Maḥmūd (B) addresses Maḥmūd (A) by the honorific titles "Bey" and "Sīdī", while there are other indices of class in the narrative, such as the fact that Maḥmūd (A) has servants and frequents fashionable uptown cafés, while Maḥmūd (B) lives in Ḥārat al-Mugharbilīn, a very poor quarter of Cairo. Even the narrator is keen to stress that, while the two men share the same name, it must not be presumed that they have

anything more than this in common. For example, at one point he asks the reader not to jump to conclusions and imagine that, by some narrative twist, the two men might share the same girlfriend, since "the gulf between these classes makes it rare for such coincidences to occur".[17]

There are also distinct attitudinal differences between the self and the other. Maḥmūd (B) is a man of tradition, whose identity is shaped by observing social rituals and honouring his social duties and responsibilities. He is a practical man, whose priorities stem from everyday realities, and who has no time for philosophy or ineffectual speculation. Above all, his very real problems — such as a shortage of money or the housing crisis — mean that he has neither the time nor the inclination to create further problems for himself. We witness this in his response to Maḥmūd (A), who asks him whether he has set any conditions for his engagement: "What? ... Oh ... There are so many terms and conditions in these matters, Sir, but they come more from her family's side than from mine."[18] Unlike Maḥmūd (A), Maḥmūd (B) perceives himself as being part of a larger social framework: "Like all those around him, he concerned himself with the general situation so as to see where he was in the overall picture."[19] Maḥmūd (A), meanwhile, perceives the world in purely egocentric terms, regarding himself as a "free agent" and rejecting social conventions, which he sees as restricting his freedom. On contemplating marriage, for example, he argues that "he could see no freedom in binding himself to a habit he might like or become accustomed to, as Maḥmūd the cigarette seller and others like him could."[20]

In many ways, the self and the other are discrete entities in this narrative, and interaction between them is generally distant and superficial. Nonetheless, they do share certain key characteristics, to the extent that they may also be seen to be the

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[17] "Al-Qayẓ", p. 88.
[18] Ibid., pp. 87-88.
[19] Ibid., p. 87.
[20] Ibid., p. 89.

inverse images of the *same* narrative self. Firstly, both men betray signs of the self-loathing and lack of self-confidence found in the narrative selves of al-Shārūnī's earlier stories. As the narrator illustrates, even down-to-earth Maḥmūd (B) is capable of pride and self-consciousness:

> The cigarette seller was a young man who had lost an eye in some accident or other — perhaps I'll tell you this story some other time — and had placed one of the lenses from a pair of sunglasses over it, tying it to his ears with two strips of fabric, and leaving the other eye to enjoy its freedom. In his view, this was guaranteed to hide his infirmity from all of the maids, who came in their wooden clogs to buy cigarettes for their masters from him. This was not my view, however, for it is certain that all of those passing must have realised that behind this dark lens hid something embarrassing to its owner.[21]

Secondly, each of these two men is in pursuit of the same goal — ontological security — and, essentially, each is as self-interested as the other. In one amusing episode, the narrator explains how both men respond to the news that compulsory conscription has been introduced. Maḥmūd (B)'s response is one of instinctive fear, since he worries (quite irrationally, on account of his infirmity) that he will be forced to sign up in the event of a third world war. Maḥmūd (A), meanwhile, takes a philosophical approach, reflecting that "conscription and war would free him from so many things rotting inside himself, and that they would transform his sluggish, monotonous life".[22] Thirdly, neither man succeeds in challenging the status quo — or indeed truly attempts to do so — although they are both its victims, albeit in different ways. Thus, by the end of the narrative, both Maḥmūds prove to be as narrow and limited as each other: both lack genuine wisdom and courage; neither is especially capable of action; and neither seems capable of mastery over the self.

In philosophical terms, the two Maḥmūds articulate the tension between free will and determinism. Egoistic Maḥmūd (A), for example, who perceives himself to be a "free agent", emphasises his determination to live his life in accordance with his own

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[21] Ibid., pp. 86-87.
[22] Ibid., p. 87.

free will. Herein lies much of the narrative's irony, since he is an altogether unconvincing agent of action — action being the very essence of free will. Maḥmūd (B), meanwhile, appears to accept his socialisation, having been thrown into the fray of day-to-day survival. As such, his personal philosophy leans more towards predeterminism and fatalism. Either way, the narrative closes with neither man having actually changed or achieved anything, and with both characters stuck in the same state of stasis.

A second, and more covert, other in the narrative is the heatwave, which is the main agent of action and a symbol for the hegemonic other. As Hafez and Cobham note: "The heatwave, rather than either of the characters, is the hero of the story, like the plague in Camus's novel of that name."[23] Powerful, omnipresent, harsh and oppressive, the narrator speaks of "this cursed heatwave, which had engulfed the entire day from the first light of dawn".[24] The suffocating, enervating atmosphere it creates expresses the political tyranny and repression of that era, while also serving as a metaphor for popular apathy or lack of resistance, be it in the form of Maḥmūd (A)'s intellectual laziness, or Maḥmūd (B)'s inability to look beyond the imperatives of his everyday burdens.

Symbols and Psychological Discourse

A distinct feature of this narrative is its use of the two Maḥmūds. At first, they appear to present two oppositional points of view, thereby giving a duality of perspective to the text. As we have seen, however, it may be argued that they are also the inverse images of the same self, an argument which is supported by the use of two key symbols. The first of these is the mirror, in which Maḥmūd (A) catches sight of himself on entering Maḥmūd (B)'s shop, reminding us of how the self is simultaneously self and other: "He saw himself coming towards himself, in the mirror

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[23] Hafez and Cobham, op. cit., p. 46.
[24] "Al-Qayẓ", p. 84.

that the cigarette seller had hung outside his shop";[25] and: "Maḥmūd was unable to look at himself in the mirror, as he drew further and further away from himself."[26] The mirror is a highly suggestive symbol, since it confirms that Maḥmūd (A) is a self of reflection rather than action, and that he sees the world only from his own perspective. More importantly, it demonstrates that Maḥmūd (A) has a fractured, incomplete sense of self, since he fails to identify with his reflected image. The mirror also gives rise to allusions to narcissism, which, as Giddens states, is not so much associated with self-admiration, but with the shame of not living up to one's "ideal self-image",[27] a fact which is confirmed when we consider Maḥmūd (A)'s inherent self-dissatisfaction and self-loathing. A second symbol supporting the argument for a split self lies in the fact that Maḥmūd (B) is blind in one eye. His capacity to see only "half" of a situation, and his blinkered, rather limited perspective on life, also express his "incompleteness", or the prematuration of his sense of self.

Another notable feature of "al-Qayẓ" is its narrator. Garrulous and unashamedly intrusive, he is undramatised, yet highly visible. Narrating in the third person, he routinely breaks frame to pass comment on events, and to pass opinions on the actions or thoughts of the characters. At times disparaging, gossipy, exasperated or sardonic, the narrator's deadpan irony lends humour to the text. He is particularly unrelenting in his treatment of Maḥmūd (A), who is the subject of numerous scathing remarks:

> Maḥmūd is a young intellectual — which is curse enough in this day and age — and is obsessed with creating difficulties, and claiming that he will overcome them. For example, when he woke this morning, he got it into his head that his smoking had become a ridiculous habit, and that it had got him in its grip and that he wanted to be free [of it]. For him, freedom was often little more than attempting to escape a habit such as smoking, which is why he decided that, from this day on, he would stop doing it. He didn't know why he had chosen this of all days, [or] this season of the year.[28]

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[25] Ibid., p. 87.
[26] Ibid., p. 88.
[27] Giddens, op. cit., pp. 68-69.
[28] "Al-Qayẓ", p. 84.

> I shall not delude the reader by saying that I do not know what conversation passed between them [Maḥmūd and Ilhām], although I realise how much the reader would really like to know about it. But I am sincere when I say that it is not improbable that it was a trivial and stupid conversation.[29]

In view of the narrator's insight into the workings of Maḥmūd (A)'s mind, it would appear that he, too, is an intellectual. Another indication may be found in the way in which he insists — somewhat unnecessarily — on giving the classical equivalent *(ḥaflat al-qirān)* of the colloquial expression *katb al-kitāb.*[30] This is not to imply that the narrator expresses any real empathy with his subject, for the only person with whom he appears to have any sense of affinity is the narratee, whom he addresses in an open and friendly manner. Expressions such as: "Perhaps I'll tell you this story some other time",[31] and: "Wouldn't it be better if you made up some condition which, in your estimation, would be sufficient to create a predicament if it were not to be carried out?",[32] suggest that the narrator perceives the narratee as an intellectual equal, and that they might even be old acquaintances. In many ways, the voice of the narrator appears to be a persona for al-Shārūnī himself, addressing his educated, middle-class reader.

The effect of this self-conscious narrator is to detract from the realistic allusion of the text, a modernist technique which al-Shārūnī was among the first to exploit. Through the ironic way in which he brings attention to the act of narrating, he also lessens the emotional intensity of the text, emphasising its lack of depth, and that of its characters. Above all, the narrator's prominence in the text allows him to claim authority over it, and to ensure that the reader's reaction to the characters is generally unsympathetic. Other aspects of the text which are identifiably modern include the fact that it lacks a conventionally constructed plot, consisting basically in a set of loosely-related episodes, often with little continuity between them. This shifting from one

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[29] Ibid., p. 89.
[30] The Islamic ceremony of the marriage contract.
[31] "Al-Qayẓ", p. 86.
[32] Ibid., p. 89.

character and setting to another gives an uneasiness or underlying tension to the text, reflecting both the psychological state of Maḥmūd (A), and the destabilising impact of a changing society. Then there is al-Shārūnī's rather inventive use of imagery: in this upside-down, irrational world, inanimate objects take on "human" qualities, while humans are objectified. The heatwave, for example, is described as "lying prone" on the city and the street is "tortured by thirst",[33] while Maḥmūd's girlfriends are described as coming one after the other "like the carriages of a train".[34] Al-Shārūnī also fills his text with ugly or offensive images, such as of people sweating, men pressing themselves against women in tramcars, donkeys urinating, milk curdling and corpses decomposing.[35] These present an image of a hellish, amoral world, supported by the narrator's remark: "A rumour spread in the city that the whole world had become evil, so God thought that he would save himself the trouble of transporting all the people to hell by making a hell of the earth itself."[36]

A final feature of "al-Qayẓ" is its psychological depth and dynamism, which speaks of a growing interest in psychoanalysis among Arab intellectuals at this time. The text is also visibly influenced by the writings of Freud, with al-Shārūnī making direct reference to the Freudian concept of mother-fixation.[37] There are also intertextual shades of Camus in the narrative, with the heatwave assuming a role similar to that of the plague in Camus' *La Peste*,[38] and the asocial Maḥmūd (A) reminding us of Mersault, the anti-hero of *L'Étranger*. Like Mersault, Maḥmūd (A) is aloof and detached, and is removed from his own and others' emotions. Yet, as with characters

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[33] Ibid., p. 85.

[34] Ibid., p. 86.

[35] Many of the stories al-Shārūnī produced during this period contain shocking, sinister, ugly or perverse images. The most striking example is the Kafka-esque "Difā' Muntaṣaf al-Layl", which uses a range of such images to suggest social and moral disease and decay.

[36] "Al-Qayẓ", p. 85.

[37] As Hafez and Cobham note: "Freud's works were in vogue at the time, particularly *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which was translated into Arabic for the first time in the late 1940s", op. cit., p. 55

[38] Cf. also al-Shārūnī's short story "al-Wabā'" ("The Plague"), first published in *al-Adīb*, October 1950, reprinted in *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, pp. 100-108.

such as Zayṭa and Sayyid Afandī ʻĀmir, Maḥmūd (A)'s distance is also a strategy for self-protection.

2. "Al-ʻUshshāq al-Khamsa" ("The Five Lovers"), 1950

Published just one month after "al-Qayẓ", "al-ʻUshshāq al-Khamsa" portrays the Egyptian intellectual in an altogether more positive and favourable light. It paints an evocative, and at times romantic, picture of the atmosphere of excitement and experimentation among Egypt's young artists and writers during the post-war period. Spoken through the voice of a dramatised narrator, its events focus on the activities of five talented young men, at the head of whom is the poet, Ḥāmid. Each of these young men is in love with Salwā, a bright, beautiful, dynamic young woman who, for two years, is a source of inspiration to their circle. Yet not one of these "five lovers" ever confesses his feelings openly to her, including Ḥāmid, although he loves her passionately. And so, as the narrator tells us, "one of them found that he was her painter, and another her musician, and Ḥāmid found that he was her poet, and my friend thought that he was her sculptor, and finally the fifth one came along — and he was the youngest — and decided to philosophise the entire thing".[39]

Yet tragedy is ever present behind this adolescent idyll: on the national level, society is disintegrating, and a pall of anxiety and suffering hangs over the country. What is more, with the horrors of war and the atomic bomb still fresh in the five lovers' memories, they live in fear of the collapse of global civilisation.[40] The catalyst for their unmaking comes when Salwā announces her engagement to one of her university professors, upon which Ḥāmid falls ill, and later dies. The group dynamic now shattered, the lovers disband, and as the narrative draws to its close, we see them

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[39] "Al-ʻUshshāq al-Khamsa", p. 8.

[40] Hence al-Shārūnī's initial choice of title, "Ayyām al-Ruʻb" ("Days of Terror"). Al-Shārūnī claims that his editor chose to re-title the story on the publication of his first collection in 1954. This decision was taken largely for aesthetic reasons, although a less negative title was also preferred, in what was then a more optimistic post-revolutionary climate. Yūsuf al-Shārūnī, personal interview, 12 September 1998.

setting out, drunk and laughing, into an "endless, still, nocturnal freedom".[41] Yet, despite their struggles and personal tragedies, their youth, vitality and ambitions ensure that their future will be one of promise and excitement:

> For at that time a treatment for polio had been discovered; a new means to stop metal and machines rusting had been devised; a machine had been invented to solve a hundred thousand problems in one minute; while with another scientists could measure things three hundred times finer than the human hair. Another magnetic pole had been discovered in the northern hemisphere, experiments had been made to bring the dead back to life, and capital punishment had been abolished in some parts of the world.[42]

Al-Shārūnī concedes (albeit rather reticently) that "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa" was inspired by his days as a university student.[43] His narrative captures the political, intellectual and artistic spirit of the pre-revolutionary period in Egypt, with its mixed emotions of optimism and fear, and its hopes and aspirations for liberation — of the country from its foreign occupiers; of its people from a tired and corrupt regime; of Egyptian women from the abusers of patriarchy; and of the individual intellect from conservatism and ignorance.

The Self and the Other: The Young and Dynamic Versus the Old and Static

The self of the text is the young, ambitious, forward-looking intellectual, as represented by each of the five lovers, or Salwā. Unlike Maḥmūd (A) in "al-Qayẓ", this narrative self is characterised by energy and vitality, by hope and an openness to new ways of thinking. A sense of collective identity is prominent among the lovers, who "felt that they had one generation in common, one fear, one hope, and that they were embraced by one person".[44] Thus the collective self is that entire generation of

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[41] "Al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa", p. 12.

[42] Ibid., p. 13.

[43] Yūsuf al-Shārūnī, letter to the author, 9 July 1996. Interestingly, although he singles out a number of fellow students in this letter, among them Fatḥī Ghānim and the critic, poet and historian Maḥmūd Amīn al-'Ālim (b. 1922), al-Shārūnī fails to mention the writer and critic Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt (b. 1925), on whom the character of Salwā is commonly thought to have been based.

[44] "Al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa", p. 7.

young Egyptians who led the post-war drive towards socio-political and cultural transformation, and to whom the narrator introduces us at the opening of the text:

> In the middle of the twentieth century in Egypt there lived a generation of young people, who had seen the past die out behind them and the future go to others. Their feet were unable to stand firmly in the present. This generation used to read literature by the light of paraffin lamps, and used to study while listening to the blare of the radio in the nearest café. They sought for joy in vain, as disease and pain spread all about them. They suffered anxiety and deprivation, yet struggled on heroically, until their nerves were shattered and loneliness tore at their insides, and they lost faith in themselves and in the world.[45]

In gender terms, Salwā is also an other to the five lovers, being sweetheart, muse and mother rolled into one, and a comfort in the face of their anxieties and uncertainties.[46] She is also the main agent of action in the narrative: as passions intensify and rivalries surface, each of the young men becomes more daring in his creations. Wilful and confident, Salwā is well aware of the effect she has on others:

> [Her] nineteen-year-old body teemed with dreams and imagination, and a poetic, virgin spirit burst forth from her. She had experimented with her budding talents in her small, confined environment, and was aware of the extent to which her gentleness and will-power could fill those around her with joy and ambition ... [47]

Salwā is an idealised projection of al-Shārūnī's, emancipated, modern Egyptian woman. The text reveals how she uses her move to Cairo as a means of expanding her social and intellectual horizons, and of satisfying her ambitious reflexive project of the self, thereby transcending society's limited expectations of her. As such, she is an other of progress and of the future, and defies prevailing attitudes of uncertainty and timidity. One of the lovers says of her: "We admired her courage, at a time when Eastern women had removed the veil, but had not yet liberated themselves from it",[48] while his friend adds: "We admired her will and her ability to choose, at a time when

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[45] Ibid., p. 6.

[46] Appropriately, the name Salwā means "comfort", or "solace".

[47] "Al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa", pp. 7-8.

[48] Ibid., p. 9.

we saw women still coming to men out of a sense of compliance and submission, rather than one of volition and the desire to give."[49] As a symbol for the Egyptian nation, Salwā may also be viewed as an idealised projection of a modern, liberated Egypt, participating in new political, intellectual and cultural enterprises.

In ideological, intellectual, spiritual, emotional and cultural terms, there is little divergence between the self and the other here. Yet, despite endless time spent in political debates, study sessions and on educational excursions, there is always some distance to their interaction, for Salwā is close to, yet ultimately beyond, the lovers' grasp. As ever, the narrative self is still beset by insecurities and uncertainties, which prohibit it from attaining — or ever truly *attempting* to attain — what it so desires. The narrator illustrates this phenomenon by showing the lovers' reluctance to confess their true feelings for Salwā:

> Progressing a little in their creations, they would stop for a moment, fearing that such frank statements or forms of expression would not achieve their ends. Often they doubted the power, truth and value of what they were doing, and would not hesitate to put it to one side or postpone it.[50]

Significantly, the self cannot make sense of its fascination with the other, nor can it articulate it. Even Ḥāmid, deemed the most eloquent of the group, feels inhibited and inadequate before Salwā, and can make only oblique references to his feelings for her through his poetry:

> And then the morning comes, and then the afternoon, and the day presses on, as he hopes fearfully to reveal his true feelings. And yet he dreads it, knowing that to confess before them (in his poetry) is expression, whereas to confess before her is action. He was content with expression without the action, and to make efforts, but not the effort of achievement.
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> And so the days passed, and all that his confessing before them achieved was to crystallise their longing, making them incapable of making any effort themselves. And so they found an excuse for not attempting what they feared might not succeed.[51]

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[49] Ibid., p. 9.
[50] Ibid., p. 9.

Essentially, the five lovers are unable to express their love to Salwā because they cannot yet express themselves fully and authentically. Caught between their creative, optimistic inner urgings, and their fears at revealing this before a static and hidebound society, they crave new modes of expression and a new, indigenous vocabulary. As such, the self lacks confidence because it is not aware of the extent of its own potential, nor has it been afforded the opportunity to discover it. Such a tension, which underpins the narrative, owes much to the setting of a nation under occupation, albeit shifting to its final, pre-revolutionary phase. In particular, the thwarted desires and aspirations of the self reveal the fears and frustrations of Egypt's younger population, and their conflicts with the holders of authority at that time.

This brings us to a second, implied other in the narrative, which is once again the state, or hegemonic other. Old, backwards-looking, stale and static, it may be identified, with hindsight, as the *ancien régime*, contrasting vividly with the youth and vitality of the lovers. Enslaved to the old and openly hostile to the new, the hegemonic other is characterised by torpor and complacency. Furthermore, it is oppressive and coercive, and attempts to stifle all hopes and ambitions in the self:

> At that time, the youth of that generation were spread throughout the cities of Egypt, killing time in the cafés or loitering after girls in the main streets. They were bound by a feeling of misery and fear, and wavered between a great despair and an even greater hope ...
>
> Old age had crept into their sideburns, and senility had filled their spirits, while they were still in the prime of their youth ... And the young peasants in the villages and countryside of Egypt withered and dropped into the land ... into their land ... into *our* fertile, silt-black land.[52]

An Emergent Vision of A New National Community

"Al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa" demonstrates a fusion of romantic, realistic and modernistic features. Although romanticism was well on the wane by the time that it was written, the romantic element is pronounced nonetheless. First, it dwells on two of the key

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[51] Ibid., p. 10

[52] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

themes of romantic writing: art and love. As writers such as Maḥmūd Taymūr did before him, al-Shārūnī attempts in "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa" to elevate the status of the artist in Egyptian society, making these five young intellectuals the heroes of his text. He also dwells, somewhat sentimentally, on their emotional torments, and charts their conflicts of the heart, mind and soul. Ḥāmid, in particular, is the text's romantic hero; as Hafez explains, the romantic hero of the Arabic short story is traditionally "presented as having emotions, ideas and aspirations that cannot be adequately satisfied within the society in which he must operate".[53] Ḥāmid also testifies to the romantic hero's talents and depth of perception, his dreams and aspirations revealing "a new ethical scale superior to that of the existing morality".[54] Lastly, the text embraces some of the more subversive, revolutionary themes of romanticism, such as nationalism and the rebellion against intellectual stultification and outmoded political institutions.

The tone of "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa" is in turns melancholy, humorous, passionate and poetic, and is resonantly bitter-sweet. While never straying into the realms of archaisms or over-embellishment, al-Shārūnī employs much elegant vocabulary, favouring the use of epithets, symbols and metaphors over simple, denotative language. In particular, passages relating to the natural environment are particularly dream-like and mellifluous:

> That day, Cairo had inhaled the scent of winter unfolding for the first time. After setting, the sun had left a divine, pure light behind, which enveloped the western horizon for a long while. And in the east, the moon appeared, wrapping itself then re-appearing among its soft, white, luxurious clouds. The cool breeze began to brush against the rooftops, flooding the room of the great secret with its youthful bloom, proceeding on its nocturnal journey across cities and villages, deserts and seas.[55]
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> The sky was almost clear of the clouds that had clung there at the start of the night; the moon was revealed, calm and silent, half-way between the earth and the sky. The roads of the city stretched as though without end, as the lights

[53] Hafez, "The Modern Arabic Short Story", p. 293.
[54] Ibid., p. 293.
[55] "Al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa", p. 6.

> from the street-lamps, erect, alert and tranquil, glistened on the wet ground. A breeze quivered, laden with dew and a sweetness pregnant with movement and life.[56]

Other images are simple almost to the point of cliché, as when the narrator describes Salwā as being "like a gazelle",[57] lending an unaffectedness and naïveté to the text which complements the characters of its five young heroes. Perhaps the most prominent symbol is that of the woman as goddess, first encountered in "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis". Like Sayyid Afandī's sweetheart, Salwā too is deified and worshipped by the lovers, like some remote and unattainable idol. Notably, she is rendered in a portrait of the virgin Isis suckling the infant Horus, a particularly indigenous representation of her as the most sacred of the ancient Egyptian goddesses. She is the sanctified and unblemished object of their desire: serene, wise and distinguished, and as noble as the ancient Egyptian civilisation itself. Again, this symbol has nationalistic undertones: Salwā as Isis is the Egyptian motherland, an image which is reinforced by the narrative's many allusions to birth and renewal, as when the narrator speaks of humanity's "labour pains"[58] during this turbulent period.

Through a suggestive use of narrative space, the author demonstrates how potentially transformative activities were taking place on the fringes of society at this time, away from the knowledge and intervention of the authorities. Ḥāmid's room, on the top floor of a building at the bottom of a dead-end alley, is where most of the action in the narrative takes place, its "great secret"[59] emphasising the clandestine nature of what goes on within. For it is within this room and its immediate environs that a prototypical Egypt of the future is being created; it is a parallel world, projecting a wistful, if ironic, image of an ideal(ised) national community:

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[56] Ibid., p. 12.
[57] Ibid., p. 9.
[58] Ibid., p. 7. This expression, and the notion of a people suffering in bondage and decay, but with the promise of future glory before them, can also be found in *Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 8:18-26.
[59] "Al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa", p. 6.

> There was "The Princes' Pressers", where their clothes were washed and ironed; there was "The Happiness Hair Salon", where they would go for a hair-cut or shave; there was "The Liberty Restaurant", where they would sometimes go for a meal, and "The Honesty Grocery", where they would find what they needed of cigarettes, coffee, sugar and tea; and then there was "The National Café", where they would sit, especially on summer days.[60]

Unlike in "al-Qayẓ", "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa" has a fully sympathetic, relatively non-intrusive narrator, who expresses solidarity of sentiment with his narrative subject group. Although a narrator-character, he is merely on the periphery of the five lovers' circle, and keeps himself firmly in the background of the action at all times. All we know of him is that he is a friend of the sculptor's, and that his name is Ḥamdī, from which we may infer that he is young like the others,[61] and that he too is gifted, since "no one without talent — not even a pretender — was allowed to join their special circle".[62] The narrator fulfils two functions in the text: first, he is a vehicle for the externalisation of the inner narrative self, since, in his capacity as an omniscient, self-conscious narrator, he is able to give a voice to these lovers, which they themselves lack. Second, he explains the significance of the role the lovers play within their socio-political milieu, since "it was from among this generation that Egypt looked for the leaders who would save it from dissolution and backwardness, and from all the forms of suffering it endured".[63]

With its outspoken protests against both government and society, the discourse of this text is more explicitly ideological than those we have analysed thus far. Nonetheless, al-Shārūnī is characteristically cautious in this respect. In particular, he puts temporal distance between the narrator and the events of the narrative, so as to blur their immediate identification with the present. Thus, while the text is set clearly within a contemporary context, the narrator appears to speak as though looking back in time, offering explanations of the historical and socio-political situation, as though to a

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[60] Ibid., p. 6.
[61] Although this is not obvious; he mentions at one point that he walks with a stick.
[62] "Al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa", p. 8.
[63] Ibid., p. 6.

narratee who is not of, or has no knowledge of, that era. Naturally, such a device serves to distort the immediate significance of the text's political message, and protects the author to some degree from censure or punishment.

Another ideological theme concerns the relationship between power and knowledge. While the first chapter illustrates a self in search of sexual freedom and knowledge, the self in this chapter is in search of *intellectual* freedom and knowledge. What is more, knowledge is shown to provide the key to freedom, for it is by knowing that the self can confront the other. This "will to knowledge" is expressed most vividly in Salwā, whose personal narrative may be read as a subversive counter-strategy against the limitations of a patriarchal society. The significance of her marrying her professor should also be noted, since this symbolises her entry into the intellectual "establishment": by aligning herself with a powerful male, she enjoys a kind of abstracted power, or power-by-association.

"Al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa" seems at times to be a tragic text; it features unrequited love and untimely death, while expressions of pain and misery appear on the personal and social levels. Nonetheless, behind the constant frustrations and setbacks, the overriding mood is one of faith in the human spirit, while the promise of salvation is never absent from the text. Although frank in its portrayal of the suffering in Egyptian society, the discourse does not dwell unnecessarily on morbid or painful topics, using ellipsis to gloss over Salwā's marriage and Ḥāmid's death, being its two most tragic events. It also stresses the inevitability and correctness of progress and change, foregrounding the hourly chiming of the university clock, so as to emphasise the dynamism and irreversibility of time. Above all, the text boasts a determinedly optimistic narrator, who finds hope in even the bleakest of predicaments:

> I realised that their friend's death had frightened them, but realised also that this pain was the beginning of the road, for I know that tragedy is only one aspect of the phenomenon. And I know more than this: that each tragedy

carries within it the essence of its salvation, and that a light will shine in the darkness.[64]

3. "Risāla ilā Imra'a" ("A Letter to a Woman"), 1951

"Risāla ilā Imra'a" takes up some of the more minor themes left undeveloped in "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa". Again, we encounter the story of a young, educated, middle-class man, who falls in love with a bright and beautiful woman, who breaks his heart when she leaves him to marry another. "Risāla ilā Imra'a" goes one step further than "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa", however, in that it offers greater insight into the sexual politics of this period, returning to the theme of the status of the Egyptian woman, and discussing her role in a rapidly transforming society. The narrative examines issues such as love, sex and marriage in the light of new societal attitudes, particularly the emancipation of women.[65] Further, it focuses on the ideals and expectations of the young middle-class male, and the conflict between traditional values — defined generally in terms of family or group loyalties — and the emancipatory promise of individualism. As Hilary Kilpatrick notes:

> The search for love is intimately connected with the individual's desire for freedom and fulfilment, while the frank affirmation of sexuality, of whatever kind, represents a challenge to a rigid and hypocritical social order [...] Much more than in most West European literatures, discussions about love and sexuality in modern Arabic literature are intricately connected with ideas about society and the individual's place in it.[66]

The young woman to whom this "letter" is addressed is Najwā, a shy, attractive, middle-class girl, who has had some semblance of a liberal education.[67] We never learn the identity of the man who falls in love with her, since the narrator refers to him

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[64] Ibid., pp. 12-13.

[65] These appear to be themes of some significance to al-Shārūnī; another short story exploring these issues is "Nāhid wa Nabīl" ("Nāhid and Nabīl"), published one year after "Risāla ilā Imra'a" in *al-Adīb*, Beirut, October 1952. Reprinted in *Risāla ilā Imra'a*, pp. 60-65.

[66] "On Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature", in Allen, Kilpatrick and de Moor (eds.), op. cit., p. 15.

[67] The narrator notes that she "had made some attempts at art and drawing", and that she had been heard "talking about Dickens and Oscar Wilde". "Risāla ilā Imra'a", p. 47.

only as "my friend". This "friend", we learn, has a particular philosophy: that a love-match must constitute a partnership among equals, in which both parties respect and understand the other. He rejects the traditional model of the woman as slave and sex object and, in spite of the attitudes instilled in her by her upbringing, Najwā finds herself becoming attracted to his ideas. Their relationship blossoms, and they begin to talk of marriage, until Najwā unexpectedly withdraws from the affair. Her family has decided that she should marry her wealthy cousin, and so she finds herself "booked", "as one would book a seat at the cinema".[68] Ultimately, Najwā chooses not to rebel against her family's decision, since she realises that the alternatives would require too much effort on her part.[69] To the narrator, her actions are not only a betrayal of the man who loved her, but also an abdication of her responsibilities as a modern, educated woman.

The Self and Its Ideal(ised) Female Other

To consider the self/other dichotomy in gender terms, the narrative self here is Najwā's admirer, while the narrative other is Najwā. Young, educated, middle-class and male, the self rejects bourgeois ideology, and argues that men and women should be in touch with their spirits and free from petty social restraints. Yet he is fundamentally ambivalent in his attitudes towards women, for, in spite of having had numerous romantic liaisons, he has only had experience of two types of woman:

> Those who easily and joyfully gave him what he desired (as they did with other men, thereby depriving him of the true pleasure of getting what he wanted), and those who had learnt from the lessons of the first type. They were cautious, and made him aware of this with every step they took, making him conscious of an uneasiness between him and them. He would find some form of excuse for this type, even if he didn't find them to be particularly intelligent, since the common belief among them (which had its bases in society) was that, for as long as the woman denied herself to the man, she

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[68] Ibid., p. 56.

[69] This aspect of the story parallels the conflict between Maḥmūd and his girlfriend Ilhām in "al-Qayẓ". Maḥmūd asks Ilhām to try to become "more mature and more cultivated" before they marry, a request which Ilhām finds "obscure and meaningless". She refuses to comply, on the grounds that it would "require a little effort on her part, and she did not see that she should have to make any more effort than she had for the last twenty years". See "al-Qayẓ", pp. 89-90.

> would elevate her status and give him more confidence in her morals. That was why, if a woman rushed to him, he would be overcome by doubts, and she would be gone from his soul just as soon as he had had her. As such, his past experiences had taught him to be more pessimistic than optimistic.[70]

On meeting Najwā, however, a reserved yet moderately enlightened young woman, this idealistic young man realises that his goal is not to sleep with her, but to attain a meeting of hearts and minds, "on a path on which two people meet and proceed together".[71] This partnership, he declares, must entail a mutual form of exchange, his "method",[72] as the narrator explains to Salwā, being that:

> [...] he gain new knowledge from you at every moment, and that you gain new knowledge from him at every moment. By this you would discover yourselves together, and reach worlds that the man can only explore through the woman, and which the woman can only explore through the man.[73]

Once again, we find a self who seeks wholeness from the other; notably, the narrator remarks of his friend that Najwā was "a way for him to realise himself and his existence".[74]

Najwā, the other, appears to be structured similarly to Salwā from "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa", although she is more tentative in her attempts to break free of patriarchal tradition, and possesses less of Salwā's confidence and dynamism.[75] Shy and apprehensive, she has been sheltered within the confines of an over-protective family, and feels fearful as her admirer takes her "from one unknown to another".[76] Like him, Najwā too is a self-in-process, seeking wholeness and a sense of cohesion through the

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[70] "Risāla ilā Imra'a", p. 47.
[71] Ibid., p. 48.
[72] Ibid., p. 48.
[73] Ibid., p. 48.
[74] Ibid., p. 46.
[75] A very similar female protagonist, also called Najwā, appears in the short story "Hadhayān" ("Delirium"), published just one month after "Risāla ilā Imra'a" in *al-Adīb*, Beirut, April 1951. Reprinted in *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, pp. 156-160.
[76] "Risāla ilā Imra'a", p. 48.

other, as we may see when she proclaims: "I want to understand ... I want to be ..."[77] Yet she is essentially a product of her bourgeois upbringing, and hers is the "problem of the young girl who belongs to a conservative milieu, who acts as a free agent, who gives her word and is ready to keep it, as long as the milieu [itself] does not react".[78]

Although the narrator presents Najwā as edging towards her self-development with reticence and caution, this is perhaps representative of most of the women of her class and epoch. As her lover complains, she appears merely to "act out" a struggle against the social and symbolic order, rather than actually confront the conditions that inhibit her development. Yet Najwā's self-perceptions do change, as we may see from the following:

> As you sat with him, sipping grape juice in that chic little bar, you realised then that he had distanced you completely from that long, traditional history of the woman to which you were spiritually, intellectually and tangibly bound. You felt that something attracted you to him, yet that this same thing frightened you away from him. For, little by little, he was pulling you away from that lofty ideal which had reigned for generations over the history of the woman: that she is a body for a man, who crushes her with his powerful arms and stirs her with his hot breaths, and whom she lives with meekly like a parasitic animal. He was battling with you so that you might become an independent personality, wilful and liberated. For the relationship between you would never be one of a servant and her master, but of two friends, its depth increasing by commitment, social co-operation, by physical interaction and procreation.[79]

For much of the text, interaction between the self and the other rests on mutual attraction, affection, and intellectual and cultural proximity. Yet, Najwā's sudden, and unrepentant, withdrawal from their relationship underlines a hidden, and deep-rooted, distance between them. A series of self/other power struggles are embedded in the discourse: between the male and the female, and between the forces of modernity and the forces of conservatism. Key to both of these struggles is the woman's emancipation, defined by her level of education and her readiness and ability to

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[77] Ibid., p. 54.

[78] Raymond Francis, "Youssef El-Charouni: Lettre à une femme", in *Aspects de la littérature arabe contemporaine* (Beirut: Dar al-Maaref, 1963), p. 177.

transcend tradition. In short, the self constructs an *idealised* female other, which he takes upon himself to shape:

> You found him always insisting that you read, saying to you that, throughout his long history, man has not only distinguished himself by his bodily power, but also by his learning, and that even though woman is not capable of being physically stronger than him, she can equal him in learning, which is the principle means today by which she might liberate her body and soul. First, he encouraged you to read what has been written about women, then to expand into a study of the art in which you specialised, and then he suggested some novel or other, and asked you finally to read the daily newspaper. He said that by doing so you would be taking part in the world as a whole, and would be truly living in the middle of the [twentieth] century. He took you to bookshops, museums, cinemas and the Opera House.[80]

The self also assumes that the other will want more than just to marry and bear children, and encourages her "to rebel against a life of monotonous servitude".[81] At first, Najwā seems to be appalled at such a prospect, protesting:

> "Do you think that I am like any girl, whose only concern in life is to think about that social bond and to live only for the sake of it? What would be the point of my living, then? I would be like an animal, living only to eat and reproduce. A life like that would be soulless and trivial."[82]

Yet Najwā nonetheless reverts "to type" in the end, laying herself open to the charge that she is denying her intelligence, and acquiescing to her traditional, subject position.

A Feminist Reading of "A Letter to a Woman"

In spite of its title, "Risāla ilā Imra'a" is not rendered in the form of a letter, although it does bear some of the hallmarks of the epistolary genre, such as the fact that it deals with moral or semi-philosophical issues. In particular, it lacks the formulae of a letter, notably an opening reference or greeting to the addressee, and the signature of its sender. It features informal language, with parts bearing characteristics of speech, such

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[79] "Risāla ilā Imra'a", p. 51
[80] Ibid., p. 50.
[81] Ibid., p. 49.
[82] Ibid., p. 52.

as the use of the vocative particle,[83] and occasional exhortations such as: "Believe me, Najwā ..."[84] Confusingly, the narrator does not even appear to be *writing* to Najwā, but claims to be having a "conversation"[85] with her, although there is nothing in the text to indicate that any dialogue is taking place. Rather, the "letter" reads as one long, uninterrupted monologue, perhaps taking place inside the narrator's imagination, rather than on paper.

As is the case with Najwā's admirer, the narrator's identity remains a mystery; he too appears to be middle-class and educated, and to move with a young and enlightened crowd. Yet he appears to be less liberal in his attitudes towards women, as the following examples demonstrate:

> I cautioned him with my customary warning, saying: "We are delighted by a word which comes from a young woman's mouth, much as we are delighted by a word which comes from a child's mouth when it has reached speaking age. This is not because it gives us new knowledge, but because it expresses things that we don't expect it to express."[86]

> When he came to me that night, overjoyed at the obstacles you had overcome together, I again gave my usual, cautionary advice: "My friend, before marriage at least, the woman in our society can adapt herself to the man she will commit herself to, becoming a believer if he is or an atheist if he is. However, she may adapt herself to this new situation, until she becomes accustomed to it."[87]

We learn also from the text that the narrator's relationship to Najwā is somewhat tenuous, for he claims to have met her only once, among a crowd of friends. Naturally, this raises questions about the narrator's role, and his purpose in writing to a woman with whom his acquaintance is — by all accounts — only slight. One suggestion is that he sets out to persuade Najwā, and encourage her to reconsider marrying his friend, for, in the opening paragraph he declares: "I write to you finally in

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[83] "*Yā* Najwā".

[84] "Risāla ilā Imra'a", p. 53.

[85] Ibid., p. 46. Note that the name "Najwā" translates as "a confidential talk", or "secret conversation".

[86] Ibid., p. 47.

the hope that you might take a heroic stand with him, for fear of his losing faith in humanity, since you were his true link to the real world and mankind."[88] A second, yet unsubstantiated, suggestion is that the narrator is the spurned man's alter-ego, and that he is writing this "letter" out of pride and shame, using the persona of a "friend" to place distance between himself and his subject. Certainly, for someone who claims not to know Najwā well, the narrator has near-omniscient insight into her and her lovers' emotions, along with other intimate details of their relationship.

The tone of this text is emotional, and frequently bitter and sentimental, once more illustrating the residual influence of romanticism. This is evident in such expressions as: "My friend had fallen headlong into you with all the love and devotion he possessed",[89] and: "He drowned in your honey-coloured eyes and golden hair, until he was overcome by intoxication."[90] The narrator also portrays his friend as playing the role of romantic hero, reciting love songs about Najwā's eyes and making passionate proclamations, such as: "Love has huge potential within our human selves, which society may bury alive or crush."[91] The narrator also shows how, on the battlefield of love, his friend is noble and principled, while Najwā is the coward who capitulates to her enemies. A last example of romanticism is found in the text's emphasis on platonic and spiritual, rather than sexual, love.

In all, "Risāla ilā Imra'a" is a well-argued disquisition, which judges and passes (often acerbic) comment. As such, the narrator makes only superficial use of figurative language, presumably so as to impart authority and reason to his narrative. Figurative language, such as it exists, consists of simple, and rather modest, metaphors: the love affair is generally a "battle" or a "journey", while Najwā is described as "a piece of

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[87] Ibid., pp. 52-53.
[88] Ibid., p. 46.
[89] Ibid., p. 46.
[90] Ibid., p. 47.
[91] Ibid., p. 46.

fabric, to which her family has the right to sell to the highest bidder".[92] As the critic Raymond Francis writes: "In 'A Letter to a Woman', the narrator will make no expense, will not sacrifice to false eloquence."[93] He also makes an interesting observation about the structure of the narrative, remarking:

> It is in this text that the bachelor of philosophy remembers the lessons of those who trained him. The 'letter' that he writes to 'a woman' [...] has the manner at times of a good student presentation: the facts, the ideas, the hypotheses, the proof, the premises, the conclusions — all are there.[94]

Much can be read into the ideological discourse of "Risāla ilā Imra'a", the narrative revealing not only the extent to which male hegemony structures Egyptian society, but also the way in which male hegemony structures the text itself. For, in spite of its seemingly egalitarian message, a re-reading of the narrative from a feminist perspective reveals two related phenomena: first, that this short story is the expression of a gendered (male) author; second, that it asserts or affirms, rather than disrupts or confronts, a "masculine" discourse. This is discernible in various textual clues, notably the way it privileges the narrative self over the other, just as society privileges the male over the female. From the gender images represented in the text, we may also see how the author constructs the self and other along predetermined, socially-constructed lines: male and female are polar opposites, to the extent that they are almost gender stereotypes, the male being capable, masterful and solid, while the female is childlike, unworldly and weak.

Although he may not do so consciously, the (male) self perceives the (female) other as enigmatic and inscrutable, and his prime motivation is to "know", and thus control, her. It is also ironic that, while the male accuses the female of being resistant, or reluctant, to change in this text, the narrative discourse reveals a rigidity, or one-sidedness, to his argument. This is reflected in his conviction at the "rightness" of his

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[92] Ibid., p. 56.
[93] Francis, op. cit., p. 175.

cause, and the fact that, while he engages with the world of the other, this does not appear to stimulate any reflection on the self. Further, the male's arguments tend to be subjective and dogmatic; by not taking a stand with him, Najwā is seen to be necessarily against him, as illustrated by the narrator's remark that she "could not simply be something neutral in his life",[95] implying that she must be "all or nothing". That the letter reads as a monologue also stresses its one-sidedness, in that it permits no platform for Najwā to defend or explain her actions. Thus, in many ways, the hero's idealism is often immature and self-absorbed, while his liberal tendencies lose their appeal in the light of his egocentric and often misplaced criticisms.

A feminist re-reading of the narrative also finds irony in the fact that the male identity is founded on an ego of the heart, rather than of the mind, while the female — amusingly — is his pragmatic, polar opposite. This reverses the perception of women as emotionally irrational, particularly when we consider that Najwā is relatively balanced in her emotions, whereas her admirer becomes the victim of his unguarded infatuation. Equally ironic is the fact that, while the woman is deemed incapable of breaking free of the bondage of tradition (that is, by agreeing to a lucrative arranged marriage, as opposed to a love-match), she is nonetheless taking control of and dictating her personal destiny, if only on the grounds of her financial security.

Charles Vial suggests, somewhat controversially, that "Risāla ilā Imra'a" is "in effect destined to show that it is impossible to 'liberate' a woman if she does not want it — for can she want it?"[96] In my view, I would argue that "Risāla ilā Imra'a" is destined to show that it is impossible to liberate a woman if attitudinal change — be it male or female — is not commensurate with societal change. Najwā is seen to "fail" in the text because her aspirations — albeit modest — cannot translate into the social

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[94] Ibid., p. 177.

[95] See "Risāla ilā Imra'a", p. 52.

[96] Charles Vial, *Le Personnage de la femme dans le roman et la nouvelle en Égypte de 1914 à 1960* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1979), p. 345.

reality. Caught as she is between a progressive, liberal model of identity and the more traditional Arab construct, Najwā appears to try to please everyone, but ends up pleasing no-one. As Amina Said, an Egyptian editor and champion of women's rights observes:

> One of the most important challenges facing the Arab woman today is that of trying to equate her inner self, her thoughts and attitudes and feelings, with the contemporary social reality about her. [...] Society may move at an astonishing speed but the mind is not able to keep up with the pace, and this applies especially to matters related to women.[97]

4. "Al-Ḥidhā'" ("The Shoes"), 1951

The last story to be analysed from within this two-year time span is "al-Ḥidhā'", in which we again find themes and motifs from earlier stories, such as "al-Qayẓ" and "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa", but in a more evolved form. Al-Shārūnī describes "al-Ḥidhā'" as a "prophetic" text and claims that, of all of his stories, it is this which predicts the 1952 revolution most forcibly.[98] It is certainly a deeply ideological and politically committed narrative, in that it confronts and condemns Egypt's social problems, while articulating a desire and a will for change, although it was written some years prior to the height of the literary commitment debate in Egypt. What is especially interesting about "al-Ḥidhā'" is that it was not reprinted until 1969, when it appeared finally in al-Shārūnī's third collection, *al-Ziḥām*.[99] What this eighteen-year hiatus between printings reveals is just how modern and innovative a story it was, and how it was both politically *and* artistically prophetic, laying many of the foundations for the modernist mode (which had only just reached its apogee by the time *al-Ziḥām* was published). Along with "Difā' Muntaṣaf al-Layl", which cannot be analysed here due to limitations of space, "al-Ḥidhā'" might be described as the most modern of the short

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[97] Quoted in Hopwood, op. cit., p. 171.

[98] Al-Shārūnī, personal interview, 1 April, 1996.

[99] Al-Shārūnī claims that he did not publish the story in either of his earlier collections because "it was not of a good artistic standard". Personal interview, 12 September 1998. Al-Shārūnī is known to be an extremely fastidious writer, subjecting many of his stories to numerous revisions.

stories al-Shārūnī produced during this period, a justification for which will be given below.

The *fabula* of "al-Ḥidhā'" details the ongoing battle between Ma'mūn, a frustrated young man in his early twenties, and his decrepit old shoes, which are worn-out, rotten and patched beyond repair. Ma'mūn is an office messenger boy in a department at the Ministry of Finance, and his meagre salary cannot stretch to the luxury of a new pair of shoes. Rather, he must be content to have his old pair patched repeatedly, so that each time they become more uncomfortable and tight, to the point where they begin to cripple his feet. Ma'mūn is also frustrated by his unstimulating job, the barrenness of his emotional life, and the isolation he feels as part of a superficial and compliant society. Repressed and voiceless, much of his suffering is internalised in the form of dreams and fantasies, some of which border on the violent or macabre. On one occasion, he fantasises about hitting a policeman, on another, about stealing clothes from people's balconies, and in others still, he imagines himself violating women.

As the narrative progresses, Ma'mūn takes his shoes to be mended over again, each visit to the cobbler coinciding with some politically or emotionally significant event. On one visit his mother dies, while on another a public demonstration is held, and a number of protesters are killed. On his eleventh visit, the cobbler refuses to fix the shoes, forcing Ma'mūn into a humiliating stand-off. A dispute ensues between the men, after which the cobbler agrees to make the repairs, but stresses that it must be for the very last time. By now, the shoes are so heavily patched that Ma'mūn's feet are more crippled and constricted than ever, and the pain of wearing them is almost impossible to bear. In the story's final scene, we see Ma'mūn tear the shoes from his swollen, disfigured feet, liberating his stifled, aching toes from their dreadful imprisonment. Then, delirious from the pain, he crawls towards his bed and to the comfort and refuge of sleep.

The Self and the Other: The Alienation of the National Subject

Impoverished, frustrated, degraded and downtrodden, Ma'mūn, the national subject, is the narrative self in this text. His profession is an index of his modest social status: perceived by his superiors as little more than a servant, Ma'mūn brings coffee and runs errands, and never speaks unless he is spoken to. An isolated, melancholy, lonely individual, he lives a marginalised existence, hovering on the outskirts of people and events, looking on without ever really knowing what he is seeing, listening without ever really empathising or sharing. Like other characters in this chapter, Ma'mūn lacks a voice and the means of self-expression, and it is only in the unconscious solitude of sleep that he withdraws into his authentic, unarticulated self. This place of "bitter madness",[100] which the narrator describes as Ma'mūn's "great secret",[101] is the site of what Ma'mūn defines as his "true, independent existence".[102]

On the collective level, Ma'mūn's is a model of identity for the Egyptian masses. Like him, the majority are oppressed and frustrated, politically and economically impotent, and trapped in low-paid jobs and enforced silence. Yet, as is so often the case with al-Shārūnī's protagonists, there is a distance between the individual self and the society of which it is a part, for, rather than identifying with the collectivity, Ma'mūn despises it and feels estranged from it, forcing himself into self-imposed exile. He views society in terms of a docile herd of animals: compliant, conformist, and unquestioning of its leadership. He feels alienated from people's behaviour and attitudes, their shallow smiles and small talk, their dogged stoicism in the face of hardship, and their unpresuming goals for themselves and others like them:

> He meets them in the streets and on the trams and in the cars, and finds them talking and smiling, and he looks at himself to find that he too is talking and smiling. So he asks himself whether behind their small talk and smiles there isn't bitterness slumbering in some remote corner of their hearts ... [103]

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[100] "Al-Ḥidhā'", p. 84.
[101] Ibid., p. 84. Cf. also the five lovers' "great secret" in "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa".
[102] Ibid., p. 84.
[103] Ibid., p. 83.

In his struggle to reconcile his concealed identity with the sham of his reality, Ma'mūn conforms to the model of the fragmented narrative self. Albeit convinced that his existence is a terrible, wretched lie, the duplicity of those around him — being the duplicity of survival — leaves him confused and even doubting his understanding of this existence. Such confusions and doubts leave him isolated and fearing, and leave him further confirmed in his feelings of estrangement. As the narrator explains: "Ma'mūn does not know if his feelings are like other peoples'. Do you think they, like him, cling to a potentially ongoing pain, or do you think they forget it, and renew their lives each dawn and carry on?"[104] Fear is an identifying element of the narrative self, and is both internally- and externally-oriented:

> He began to fear himself, and to fear the forces of depression and lust which jostled within him. He began to feel that he was being pushed towards a crime, terrible and unknown. He did not know where or when it would happen, but [knew] that the reasons for it were in his body and in his consciousness.[105]

Again, the narrative other in "al-Ḥidhā'" is the hegemonic other, represented in the form of Egypt's *ancien régime*. It is identified by two of its abstractions of power: the civil service, as represented by the clerks with whom Ma'mūn works at the Ministry of Finance, and the state security forces, who feature generally in the context of the many public demonstrations and strikes in the text. Interaction between the self and the other is based on distance, difference, and descends at times into violent conflict. Self-other tensions are expressed most clearly in Ma'mūn's relationship to the clerks: unlike him, they are members of an elite group, emphasised by the narrator's description of them as a "small community".[106] They display a confidence and *joie de vivre* that is visibly absent in the self; they are free and fun-loving, their full and exciting social lives attested to by the love stories and amorous secrets they share. They also enjoy fulfilling and rewarding professional lives, engaged as they are in "the most important

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[104] Ibid., p. 83.
[105] Ibid., p. 85.
[106] Ibid., p. 84.

— and serious — of state work".[107] Ma'mūn enjoys "the spirit of fun-making"[108] that reigns among the clerks, and even takes a vicarious pleasure in overhearing the tales of their exploits. Yet, he also envies and feels resentful of them, and cannot help but wonder cynically whether their stories and jokes hide "something bitter and truly heinous behind them, squatting in the soul of every one of them".[109] For, despite their privileges, these clerks are as shallow and conformist as the rest of society, the only difference being that they seek support and approval solely from within the confines of their own community.

The existentialist theme of the alienation of the self dominates in "al-Ḥidhā". Ma'mūn, the narrative self, displays signs of ontological anxiety, morbidity and restlessness, and takes a sceptical view of what he sees as life's absurdity. His feelings of alienation stem predominantly from the fact that, for him, all else in his world is otherness. Further, as a member of a large and very poor social class, Ma'mūn is economically alienated from a small but wealthy elite. He also feels alienated because he harbours individualistic aspirations and dreams, yet is aware that his desires should be other-determined and other-determining. He feels frustrated by the way he is perceived by the other, and by the fact that his subjective needs are ignored or neglected:

> He went on picking up papers and carrying away teacups, and heard them talking and having fun, as he went up and down and down and up. He felt that the job he had been entrusted to was tiresome and futile, and that his abilities qualified him for a different position, although he could not figure out what, exactly. [...] He was searching for things to challenge him, but the people's graciousness and wittiness, and their polite overlooking of his abilities and dreams, merely wiped out all the potential which burned within his depths. He felt a sort of senility overwhelming him, which made him feel uneasy. It increased whenever he realised that he is tied to a wheel from which there is no release, and that with every year that passes — every day and every moment, even — he is tied further to this wheel, making him lose all hope of moving on, or of furthering himself in the world. And so he is ever more

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[107] Ibid., p. 83.
[108] Ibid., p. 83.
[109] Ibid., p. 84.

> restricted to this type of work, becoming further estranged from any other capability.[110]

Representations of Social Disintegration

Although it does not express it explicitly, "al-Ḥidhā'" may be located in the socially disintegrating climate of Cairo in the late 1940s. We may infer this from certain textual clues, such as its references to students' strikes and public demonstrations, an epidemic outbreak and the assassination of a prominent (possibly political) personality.[111] These events occur as a counterpoint to the main story-line of Ma'mūn's ongoing struggle with his shoes, as the following examples demonstrate:

> And on the day that the students went on strike and the demonstrations started, and the people cheered, and three of them were killed in the main square, he had his shoes mended for the fifth time.[112]

> Then the yellow fever spread, and the teachers and students went on strike, and his mother fell ill and the universities were closed and surrounded, and meetings were banned and newspaper after newspaper after newspaper was suspended, and his brother committed suicide, as he went to have his shoes mended for the tenth time.[113]

Of all the short stories al-Shārūnī produced during this period, "al-Ḥidhā'" is arguably the most experimental and "modern". This is demonstrated by its use of denaturalised language, the texture and rhythm of the narrative, and its extensive use of symbol and metaphor. The text's most salient symbol is that of the shoes of the story's title, a simple yet evocative metaphor for the other: restrictive, harmful, rotten, and — above all — past their best. As such, each mending of the shoes represents another futile concession to the regime, or decision by the people to "make do and mend",

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[110] Ibid., p. 85.

[111] Specifically, we may detect allusions to a number of incidents which took place over a three-year period: the violent students' strikes of 1946 and the press restrictions imposed in the same year; the clashes which took place between striking workers and police between 1947 and 1948; a cholera epidemic which broke out in October 1947, and the assassination of Prime Minister al-Nuqrāshī in 1948. In the version of "al-Ḥidhā'" published in the collection *al-Ziḥām*, there are also two references (on Ma'mūn's last visit to the cobbler) to Cairo's great fire of 26 January 1952, and the martial laws that followed it. Since the story was first published in 1951, this would indicate that the text was subject to later revisions.

[112] "Al-Ḥidhā'", pp. 84-85.

[113] Ibid., p. 86.

rather than replace it with a newer, more suitable model. For, as the narrator tells us, the people of Egypt "would patch everything: their shoes, their clothes and their way of life".[114] In the passage in which the cobbler is shown repairing the shoes for the final time, al-Shārūnī uses perfunctory, impassive, mechanical language, alluding to the hollow, delusive nature of the enterprise:

> He saw him hammer a nail and then pierce with his awl, then pick up the needle and call to his apprentice, light the lamp and hammer a nail, pierce with the awl and then with his needle, spit, reach for a thread and then another, cut a piece of leather with his knife and then another, then a third, and a fourth.[115]

What is also significant is the fact that, after this final patching, Ma'mūn feels totally and irreconcilably estranged from his shoes:

> Every time Ma'mūn had his shoes mended he became more distant from them. He would see that they had become more and more decrepit, and more and more uselessly reinforced. This time, however, he not only saw that they had changed in that way, but when he tried once more to force his foot inside them, he felt that they were strangers to him.[116]

Thus, the ongoing struggle between the shoes and Ma'mūn's foot is allegorical: if the shoes, as we have argued, represent the hegemonic other, then the feet represent the collective self, and their toes the Egyptian people. Further, the gradual swelling of the feet within these cramped old shoes suggests a nation fit to burst from its impossible confinement. Certainly, the emergence of a new national sensibility is hinted at in the following excerpts, which contain unmistakably subversive allusions:

> He quickly pulled off his shoes, pulled off his socks, considered his socks and considered his feet. By now his shoes were solid, reinforced, dusty, ugly. As for his socks, he threw them far away onto the floor, where they lay like two black, putrid creatures, the holes in them like old, forgotten protests.

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[114] Ibid., p. 88. Interestingly, the patching of the shoes, and the stand-off between Ma'mūn and the cobbler, is reminiscent of the scene between Akakii Akakievitch and Petrovich the tailor in Gogol's "The Overcoat". We also find similarities between Ma'mūn's relationships with the clerks, and that between Akakii Akakievitch, a minor functionary, and the other young officials in his government department.

[115] "Al-Ḥidhā'", p. 89.

[116] Ibid., p. 89.

> As for his feet, their toes began to move, rubbing against each other as though whispering some strange, painful complaint among themselves, as they shook off the sweat, which rose like the smell of vinegar towards a hidden, invisible world.[117]
>
> It was as though his feet, which had enjoyed some freedom during these moments, had grown bigger — noticeably, truly and tangibly bigger.[118]

Al-Shārūnī uses an unprecedented range of modernist narrative techniques in "al-Ḥidhā'", particularly when representing the hegemonic other. First, he employs defamiliarisation, as in similes such as: "Then he would notice his enormous, ancient shoes, extending before him like a caution or a warning",[119] which is also suggestive of the other's authoritarian, policing role. Second is his use of metonymy, which he employs in describing the police and army as "batons and helmets and guns and buttons",[120] thereby reducing them to dehumanised objects of state oppression. Third is the Nietzchean image of Ma'mūn "tied to a wheel" (see note 110 above), which not only evokes the machine-like coldness and rigidity of the other, but also the culture of dependency it sustains for its own survival. We also find allusions to the other within the organisation of Ma'mūn's family, with its dead mother, a brother who commits suicide, and a father noticeable only by his absence. This domestic scene, with no parents to guide and no cohesive system of kinship or hierarchy, is yet another representation of the disintegrating socio-political order. Similarly, the absence of a father, used commonly to allude to a ruler or regime, speaks of a rudderless society, lacking in leadership.

There is a tension in "al-Ḥidhā'" which is sustained by various means, such as the way in which it builds on the mounting political events, and its hell-like representations of the metropolis of Cairo, many of which are reminiscent of "al-Qayẓ":

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[117] Ibid., p. 90.
[118] Ibid., p. 89.
[119] Ibid., p. 86.
[120] Ibid., pp. 90-91.

> He had to walk and walk down the city's roads and alleys, burning with the blazing heat, suffocating in his clothes, maddened by the great secret, which spread everywhere ... He walked with his shoes through the great, wide streets and through the damp, suffocating alleys, on the burning ground in the glare of the sun, and through the mud that clogged the bends and corners ... He trod with them on the people's rubbish, and on the cigarette butts and the flies buzzing peacefully ... [121]

There is also a jumping repetitiveness and nervousness to the prose, reproducing Ma'mūn's anxiety, his inner pain, his dreams and fantasies. At its most acute, the narrative appears almost to hallucinate, while at more sober moments it merely meanders, suggesting the drawn-out course of philosophical reflection. In the following example, the prose begins in a downbeat, laboured vein, degenerating rapidly into nonsense and delirium:

> Then he turned towards the bed, and began a slow, anguished crawl ... There was a voice which called him to eat, as he crawled, crept and crawled, and his soul turned in on itself. And the day began to disintegrate, as the feelings crowded within him, and there was a city in which fire reigned, and in which gunfire rang out from time to time, and batons and helmets and guns and buttons and coffee cups and employees' papers, going up and down and down and up, and stickiness, and his brother committing suicide, and rottenness and the strike, and his mother dying, and the alleyways during the wars, in the mud, in the girls, in the women ... [122]

The text is also filled with trance-like examples of lexical repetition, passages of free indirect style, and sentences constructed from countless, stumbling clauses. These combine to lend rhythm to various sections of the text, reflecting the workings of the unconscious and, in parts, sexual impulses.

In "al-Ḥidhā'" we sense a genuine connection between the desires of its main character, Ma'mūn, and those of its author, al-Shārūnī. In particular, both share an inherent desire for freedom, happiness, social coherence and equality. Social inequality is a prominent theme: the narrator explains at one point how the cobbler earns more from fixing old shoes than from selling new ones, "for this war and these high prices,

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[121] Ibid., p. 86.

[122] Ibid., pp. 90-91. Note a third reference to Cairo's great fire in this passage.

and the poverty in which those people live, do not make them think of having new shoes made. Instead, they want always to have their old shoes patched."[123] New shoes are thus only for a privileged few, and are a covetable, exotic and unattainable luxury:

> From behind shop windows, he [Ma'mūn] began to get acquainted with the world of shoes, in all their types and sizes. He saw white and yellow shoes, white and red, red and black, shoes for children and shoes for adults, summer shoes and winter shoes, women's shoes for the feet of women, and shoes for the feet of men. All were ornamented, new and strong, and plentiful behind the glass. Glass, crystal, deprivation ...
>
> Then [there were] the barefooted, the uncountable, innumerable barefooted, treading through the winter mud and the burning summer heat, walking on and on towards unknown destinations, stolen needs and goals with no beginning or end.[124]

Despite the violence, disease and terror in this text, it is inherently utopian in outlook, and hints at an alternative way of life that might be lived in the nation's future. This is perhaps best illustrated in the narrator's closing, and extremely prescient, remark that "there was a great and momentous event for which he [Ma'mūn] waited, but did not fear".[125] As in "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa", al-Shārūnī closes "al-Ḥidhā'" with an enigmatic ending, alluding to significant events which loom on the national horizon, being just one of a number of elements in the text which may indeed be deemed "prophetic".

Conclusion

Most of the short stories al-Shārūnī wrote during this period have a transparently ideological, if not revolutionary, subtext, tapping into the prevailing political context. Their message is an appeal to relinquish Egypt's corrupt and stagnant regime, its outmoded feudal legacy and its stifling, oppressive rule. They reject the notion of "making do" with systems or values which have long ceased to be relevant or, indeed,

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[123] Ibid., p. 87.

[124] Ibid., p. 87. For further examples of this narrative style, see also "al-Qayẓ", "al-Wabā'" and "Hadhayān".

legitimate, as we find in "al-Ḥidhā'" and "Risāla ilā Imra'a". Further, they reveal how the dominant culture has denied the individual any expression of personal ambition or independent action, creating a crippling culture of dependence. As a consequence, the desires of the national subject remain unspoken and suppressed, although many sustain the status quo, if not out of habit then out of fear of the possible consequences. With their barely-concealed allusions to the contemporary political scene, these stories are also valuable historical documents, since they illustrate the author's own perspective of national history, in contrast to that promoted by the dominant culture of the establishment. Above all, these stories speak of hope and optimism, being the only sources of sustenance in the absence of political stability and socio-economic equality.

We may see from these four stories that the two main arenas of social change at this time were those of gender and class. In particular, women are represented as active participants in the new national community-in-process, and are shown embracing new ideas and taking on new roles, although much of this is somewhat idealistic. Due to the rise of the popular democratic movement, we also find evidence of an emergent national identity, which is particularly visible in texts such as "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa". There is also evidence of growing social cohesion and of growing interdependence between groups, as we find between men and women in "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa" and "Risāla ilā Imra'a". This sense of cohesion is expressed by the favouring of omniscient, omnipresent narrators, whose unchecked intrusions and uninhibited opinions (see "al-Qayẓ") promote a sense of affinity between the narrator and narratee, along with a sense of shared beliefs and ideals. Prototypical types of self from this period include the middle-class intellectual and the modern, emancipated woman, while existentialist themes are prominent, as are motifs such as delirium, hysteria and (social) malaise.

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[125] "Al-Ḥidhā'", p. 91.

While stories such as "al-Qayẓ" and "al-Ḥidhā'" reveal the extent of al-Shārūnī's experiments with modernism, "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa" and "Risāla ilā Imra'a" also contain evidence of the residual influence of romanticism. However, a number of the stories al-Shārūnī wrote during this period show a darker side to the national political scene, with themes such as paranoia, fear, surveillance and interrogation emerging. Two notable examples are "Difā' Muntaṣaf al-Layl" and "al-Ṭarīq ilā al-Maṣaḥḥa" ("The Road to the Sanatorium"),[126] in which we find characters who have been arrested, imprisoned, or incarcerated, but who have no idea why, or by whom. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, these sinister, Kafka-esque scenarios return with increasing frequency in al-Shārūnī's later stories.

By the end of this stage in the development of the self, it has established a sense of group identity, but has yet to understand or develop this on the individual level. Its growth in confidence means that it is becoming more optimistic and responsive, speaking out against social injustice and considering ways in which this might be changed. Further, the self is learning to make choices, exclusion coming largely from within, rather than from without, the self. All of these factors assist the process of consciousness-forming. As a consequence, dependency on the other is relatively limited at this stage, with irreconcilibility between the two sides seen as natural, and occasionally necessary. In cases where the other is a woman, there is an emphasis on romantic love, rather than on sex. Once more, we can reduce relations between the self and the other to the following paradigm:

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[126] First published in *al-Adīb*, Beirut, May 1951. Reprinted in *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, pp. 133-142. The story also appears in *al-Majmū'āt*, vol. 1, under the revised title "al-Ṭarīq ilā al-Mu'taqal" ("The Road to the Detention Camp"), pp. 161-172.

SELF	OTHER
Growth in confidence	Confidence under threat
Questioning of self	Blind self-assurance
Dynamic	Static
Open to new ideas	Closed to new ideas
Protagonist	Antagonist
Rejects past and present, future-oriented	Clings to present, past-oriented
Identity in-process	Fragmenting sense of identity
Growth in independence	Independence under threat

Chapter Three

The Self, the Other and the Imagined National Community

On 23 July 1952, the Free Officers took power in a *coup d'état*. King Fārūq abdicated in favour of his infant son, Aḥmad Fu'ād II, and sailed, two days later, from Alexandria into exile. Within one year, the monarchy had been abolished and Egypt declared a republic, bringing a new mood of excitement and optimism to the nation. This chapter takes us through the early years of the new regime, starting from February 1954, the publication date of al-Shārūnī's short story "Al-'Īd" ("The Eid"),[1] and ending in October 1959, with the short story "al-Rajul wa'l-Mazra'a" ("The Man and the Farm").[2] As usual, it begins by providing an overview of the main political events during this period, and considers the role played by the regime in shaping a new nationalist ideology and pan-Arab vision. The four short stories which will be analysed within these contexts are: "Anīsa" ("Anīsa");[3] "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl" ("Two in Holy Matrimony");[4] "al-Nās Maqāmāt" ("Every One Has His Place")[5] and "Nashrat al-Akhbār" ("The News Bulletin").[6]

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[1] First published in the weekly *Rūz al-Yūsuf*, Cairo, 1 February 1954. Reprinted in *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, pp. 14-23.

[2] First published in the daily *al-Masā'*, Cairo, 16 October 1959. Reprinted in *Risāla ilā Imra'a*, pp. 5-17.

[3] First published in *al-Ādāb*, Beirut, October 1954. Reprinted in *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, pp. 69-77.

[4] First published in *Akhbār al-Yawm,* Cairo, October 1955. Reprinted in *Risāla ilā Imra'a*, pp. 98-111.

[5] First published in the daily *al-Sha'b*, Cairo, 11 July 1956. Reprinted in *Risāla ilā Imra'a*, pp. 66-82.

[6] First published in the weekly *Ṣabāḥ al-Khayr*, Cairo, 12 December 1957. Reprinted in *Risāla ilā Imra'a*, pp. 128-137.

The Early Years of the New Regime

The July coup of 1952 was announced "in the name of the army on behalf of the whole of Egypt, not of a party, a revolutionary mass movement, or an ideology".[7] The figurehead of the coup was General Mohammed Naguib, under whom the new regime set about its first tasks of containing the popular movement and eliminating the opposition. The coup brought an end to the old ruling alliance between the aristocracy, the monarchy and the British, and succeeded in paralysing the powers of the landed classes, especially once wide-ranging agrarian reforms had been introduced. By as early as June 1953, all political parties had been dissolved, the monarchy had been abolished and the new republic had been created, with Naguib assuming the roles of Egypt's first president and prime minister. He attempted a move towards a parliamentary republic, but met with opposition from other members of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). Within just one year, he was forced to resign by his deputy, Gamal Abdel Nasser, founder of the Free Officers and a former major in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. In November 1954 Nasser himself took power, and was later elected president for a six-year term, under Egypt's new constitution. By now, institutionalised military rule had begun in Egypt, and state power had become concentrated in the hands of the RCC.

The RCC's modernising ideology visualised a strong, Egyptianised state supported by a modern, streamlined army and unfettered economic development. As old repositories of power were broken down, a new sector of the ruling class emerged, arising from the *petit-bourgeois* (especially military) elite. Social mobility was also encouraged by increased bureaucratisation and the expansion of the state apparatus, which offered new means of employment for huge numbers of non-agricultural workers. Others still were drawn into the government-led drive towards technology and industrialisation, the latter in particular spurring a wave of migration from the

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[7] Hopwood, op. cit., p. 38.

country to the cities. Below, Roger Owen describes the extent of the social transformations that followed the July coup:

> The ordinary citizen encountered the state at every turn, whether in the Mugamma, the huge building in central Cairo where it was necessary to go for passports, identity cards, export visas and the like, or out in the villages, where the local co-operative had replaced the landlords as a provider of seeds, fertilizers and credit. Meanwhile, regime policies were shaping people's lives by opening up new possibilities, providing new resources, forcing them into new organizations and creating new relationships — between employers and employees, owners and tenants, parents and children, and even men and women.[8]

As with most revolutionary regimes, the new government defined itself in national terms, making Egyptian nationalism its *raison d'être*. This was in part pragmatism, since it was one way of containing the various political configurations that had taken part in the revolutionary process. Central to this ideology was the construct of the nation, which, in Ernest Renan's words, is "a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future".[9] With Egypt's recent political history still fresh in the collective memory, the nationalist ideal was certainly resonant at this time. The most prominent advocate of Egyptian nationalism was Nasser, who aimed to forge a new spirit of civic consciousness through what Abdallah Laroui calls the "nationalist credo of the collectivity".[10] Founded on the (imaginary) premise that all Egyptians are united as one political community, irrespective of class or sectarian difference, this credo defines identity in external and collective, rather than internal and individual, terms.[11] This is

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[8] Roger Owen, *State, Politics and Power in the Making of the Middle East* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 42.

[9] Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?", in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 19.

[10] Abdallah Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?*, trans. Diarmid Cammell (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1976), p. 24.

[11] Nasser's concept of a collective, national identity also finds its origins in what Egyptian intellectuals such as Muḥammad Ḥasanayn Haykal and Ṭāriq al-Bishrī have termed *al-jāmi' al-qawmī*, or "the national unifier". This refers to a whole tradition of culture, values, world-views and political ideals which have grown up since the start of the modern national movement earlier this century, behind which lies the assumption that "the great majority of Egyptians have been to a large extent united by a sense of common identity and interest". Hani Shukrallah, "Political Crisis and Political Conflict in Post-1967 Egypt", in Charles Tripp and Roger Owen (eds.), *Egypt Under Mubarak*

not to suggest that the notion of personal identity disappears, but that a modern, secular national identity comes to be internalised as the dominant part or structure of the individual's identity.

In any analysis of state and society in Egypt after the revolution, Nasser is, without doubt, the most significant personality. The early stage of his career consisted in consolidating his position as populist leader, which he achieved by stifling all political opposition, silencing the press and getting Britain to agree to a withdrawal from the Canal Zone. He was particularly forceful in his treatment of the *Ikhwān*, notably after one of its members attempted to assassinate him in 1954. Escaping unhurt from the attack, he responded by arresting and executing six of the *Ikhwān*'s leaders, and imprisoning thousands of its members. Among the international factors which led to the securing of Nasser's position were his plans to rebuild the High Dam at Aswan with Soviet aid, the Czech Arms Deal of 1955, and the triumph of the Bandung Conference in that same year, at which Egypt agreed to the formulation of a new third world non-alignment. In July 1956 Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal, which, as Hopwood notes, was "the final step in Egypt's liberation, claiming as her own the symbol of and the reason for past imperial domination".[12] This led to what has become known as the "tripartate aggression": an invasion by Israel of Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula, in alliance with Britain and France, who attacked Egypt two days later.

After the destruction of the Egyptian airforce and considerable loss of life and property, Britain, France and Israel were forced to cease their attack under international pressure. By Spring 1957, both Israeli and UN troops had evacuated Egyptian territory, a victory which served to enhance Nasser's status, at home and in the rest of the Arab world. Having achieved his short-term nationalist goals, Nasser began to shift his sights towards Arab unity, or pan-Arabism. He found a natural ally in Syria (where the political theory of Arab nationalism had first developed), and in 1958 the

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(London and New York: Routledge, 1989) p. 63.

two countries merged, forming the United Arab Republic (UAR). One month later, Yemen joined the UAR, creating the United Arab States.

In the cultural domain, the successes of the 1952 revolution coincided with the flourishing of Marxist Socialist ideology, both of which gave rise to the realistic sensibility in Egyptian literature, frequently defined as "socialist realism" or "socialist romanticism". Socialist realism concerned itself with the people, particularly the poor and underprivileged, and their struggles against oppression and economic hardship.[13] A notable development emerging from this trend was the use of dialogue in the colloquial, and of narrative language tinged with the vernacular or idiomatic. Of the socialist realist works which appeared during this period, al-Kharrat selects 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī's (1920-87) novel *al-Arḍ* (*The Earth*)[14] and Idrīs' short story collection *Arkhaṣ Layāli*, both published in 1954, as "works of talent and distinction".[15] Much of the rest of this type of literature, he claims, was little more than "crude rhetoric", with "characters reduced to stereotypes of the optimistic and activist mould".[16]

Alongside this trend developed the concept of *iltizām* (commitment), deriving from Sartre's theory of *littérature engagée*. *Iltizām* was the antithesis of the concept of "art for art's sake", taking the view that literature should seek to change the world, rather than merely interpret or reveal it. It called for writers to demonstrate commitment to social issues, and to express an ideological vision of society in their writing. *Iltizām* was first debated in the Egyptian press in the early 1950s, when it was taken up by such eminent writers as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, and subsequently in the Lebanese literary journal *al-Ādāb*, founded in 1953 by Suhayl Idrīs (b. 1923). As Roger Allen notes:

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[12] Hopwood, op. cit., p. 47.
[13] In many ways, this trend was an extension of the nationalist literature developed after 1919 by Maḥmūd Taymūr, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898-1987) and others, albeit shaped and informed by Marxist Socialist thought.
[14] Al-Kitāb al-Dhahabī (Cairo: Rūz al-Yūsuf, 1954).
[15] Al-Kharrat, op. cit., p. 182.
[16] Ibid., p. 183.

"Those many intellectuals who espoused the goals of the revolution [...] and who felt themselves able to function within prescribed guidelines eagerly adopted *iltizām* as the organising principle of their writing."[17] Of the outpouring of Marxist literary criticism that appeared during this period, perhaps the most significant example is Maḥmūd Amīn al-'Ālim's *Fi'l-Thaqāfa al-Miṣriyya* (*On Egyptian Culture*),[18] an ideological, "committed" review of Egyptian literature.

After 1952, much of Egypt's cultural activity came under the direction of the state and its agencies. Most notable was the founding in 1956 of the Higher Council for the Patronage of the Arts, Letters and Social Sciences, established under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture. It employed many of Egypt's leading writers and scholars at that time, among them al-Shārūnī. Meanwhile, the Egyptian short story continued to flourish, as a result of projects such as the creation of the *Nādī al-Qiṣṣa* (*The Story Club*) by ex-army officer Yūsuf al-Sibā'ī (1917-78) and the *Rūz al-Yūsuf* publishing house, and the emergence of many new publishing series, such as the *Iqra'* (*Read!*) series from Dār al-Ma'ārif, the *Kitāb al-Hilāl* (*Book of Hilāl*) series from *Dār al-Hilāl*, and Rūz al-Yūsuf's *al-Kitāb al-Dhahabī* (*The Golden Book*) series, within which al-Shārūnī's first two collections were published.

The first of these, *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, met with an inspired yet relatively low-key response.[19] Like other writers of his generation, al-Shārūnī was keen to redefine and revitalise the national culture and identity, after it had been distorted and suppressed during the years of the *ancien régime*. Yet he chose not to ally himself with the socialist realist trend, preferring to persist with the modernistic and expressionistic modes.[20] Perhaps his only "concessions" to socialist realism may be found in his short

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[17] Roger Allen, *The Arabic Literary Heritage: The Development of its Genres and Criticism* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1998), p. 48.
[18] (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Jadīd, 1955)
[19] For reviews of this and later collections, see Faraj, op. cit.
[20] In view of the predominance of socialist realism at this time, this perhaps limited the appeal and accessibility of his writing.

stories "al-'Īd" ("The Eid"), and "Nagafa" ("Nagafa"),[21] two tales about poor country folk working as servants in the city. The first text, told through the eyes of a child, is infused with local colour and sentimentality and features dialogue in the colloquial, while the second has a much more revolutionary ethos, passing highly polemical comment on transformations in society, such as the end of the old feudal system and the fading influence of the rural aristocracy.

In general, al-Shārūnī's fictional output during the early years of the new regime was more subdued in its experimentalism, tending to focus on realistic, simple portrayals of family life, and often lacking the ideological impetus and avant-garde signature of earlier texts. This is especially notable in his second collection, *Risāla ilā Imra'a*, published in 1960, which contains less overt political comment and fewer references to the social milieu than its predecessor, *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa.* Interestingly, Ḥaqqī notes in his review of *Risāla ilā Imra'a* that this change in sensibility was by no means a bad thing, commenting: "Fortunately, his [al-Shārūnī's] collection has come out 'at the right time' — as they say — and to great demand, for it is a silencing response to the excesses of the attack being launched on the short story today by some of our lesser-known writers."[22] This is an allusion to those less-skilled socialist realists, whom Ḥaqqī goes on in the same article to accuse of lacking the ability to criticise the short story objectively, suggesting that they are overly-preoccupied with political commitment, at the expense of literary craftmanship.

A last point that may be noted about *Risāla ilā Imra'a* is that it possesses little of the optimistic, almost adolescent, passion of *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, which may be interpreted as a sign of al-Shārūnī's artistic and ideological maturation, and the stabilising of the national political scene. In many ways, the characters of the stories in his second collection appear to take up where the young lovers of *al-'Ushshāq al-*

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[21] First published in the weekly *Ākhir Sā'a*, Cairo, 17 August 1955. Reprinted under the title "Ḥalāwat al-Rūḥ" ("Clinging to Life"), in *Risāla ilā Imra'a*, pp. 83-97.

Khamsa leave off; the entire collection revolves around the experiential dimensions of the various rites of passage: the pleasures of falling in love and the acquisition of sexual knowledge; wooing and courtship, engagement and marriage; procreation, parenthood, aging and, finally, death. Indeed, on describing what he views as the "philosophy" of the collection, Ḥaqqī claims that it "seems to revolve around a manifestly biological, rather than social, expression of life".[23] Unlike in *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, the narrative self in *Risāla ilā Imra'a* appears largely resigned to the forces of its often bewildering existence, and rarely do we find characters who rebel or rail violently against life and its vicissitudes. One characteristic the two collections share, however, is the predominance of the middle class as the most frequently-occurring narrative subject group, as we shall see from the analyses that follow.

1. "Anīsa" ("Anīsa"), 1954

If only in theory, the new regime's nationalist ideology was a great social leveller. This, combined with the increased availability of basic and higher education, led to new expectations and forms of expression among groups that had formerly been voiceless, such as women, the rural and urban poor, and Egypt's largest religious minority, the Copts. Since Egyptian nationalism proclaimed that all Egyptians were equal, irrespective of their ethnic origin or religious affiliation, it is appropriate that minority writers, al-Shārūnī among them, should have been more confident in exploring their own cultures through their writing at this time. An example of this phenomenon is al-Shārūnī's short story "Anīsa", written in 1954, which has entirely Coptic characters, references and settings.

In "Anīsa", al-Shārūnī gives a keenly-observed account of life among "a family of Egyptian Copts, who held firmly and devotedly to the teachings of the faith".[24] Thus we see the little girl Anīsa and her family united in prayer, discussing the scriptures

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[22] Ḥaqqī, op. cit., p. 223.
[23] Ibid., p. 229.
[24] "Anīsa", p. 70.

and observing their religious duties, and are given a glimpse of Anīsa's religious instruction at school. Like the Coptic character Līzā in "Jasad min Ṭīn", Anīsa is a pious, God-fearing girl who struggles to contain her inner desires and impulses, but finds herself rebelling on occasions against her deeply conservative culture. Also like Līzā, Anīsa commits a "crime": defying her mother's orders not to do so, she disturbs a dove that has been nesting in her kitchen, killing its newborn chick and destroying an unhatched egg:

> To this day, Anīsa does not know whether the nest fell and scattered because of her, or because the dove flew away suddenly. All she knows is that before her, on the white kitchen tiles, she found some stalks of grass from the scattered nest, then the other egg. It had broken, and from inside it another chick appeared, smaller in size and pulsing with life. Two drops of blood spotted its pale, thin skin. As for the other chick, it appeared to have fallen from the window and into the stairwell.[25]

Instead of confessing to the accident, Anīsa plots against the family's servant boy, 'Ajīb, so that he is blamed for killing the dove chicks. When the boy protests his innocence, Anīsa's parents beat him soundly and accuse him of being a liar. Like Līzā, our protagonist is almost destroyed by guilt and shame; she cannot eat nor sleep, and lives in constant fear and anxiety that her treachery might be discovered. Later, as she sits in school, listening to her teacher give a lesson on Judas' betrayal of Christ, Anīsa breaks down, shaking and crying at her deception. Ironically, when the headmistress comes to enquire about the cause of the commotion, the teacher interprets Anīsa's breakdown as her reaction to the story of "Christ's fate at the hands of this traitor",[26] unaware of the little girl's struggle with her own, concealed betrayal.

The Other and the Socialisation of the Self

The narrative self here is Anīsa, the main agent of action in the text. A lively, impetuous, mischievous child, she is also innocent and impressionable, and is a self undergoing the processes of socialisation. As such, she is subject to an overwhelming

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[25] Ibid., p. 74.
[26] Ibid., p. 77.

mass of moral and social criteria, central to which is her Christian faith, its culture and supporting ideologies. Her faith is also central to the shaping of her collective identity and, through means such as ritual and religious instruction, she is taught to recognise and cherish the distinctness of the Coptic community. Class is also a prominent factor in Anīsa's socialisation, her bourgeois background determining many aspects of her upbringing, such as her moral codes, behaviour, education, and so on.

As ever, there are numerous others in the narrative. The first is 'Ajīb, the family's boy-servant, who is also a Copt and of a similar age to Anīsa, but who is working-class, uneducated and from a poor village outside the capital. Then there is the ubiquitous hegemonic other, expressed in such forces of authority as Anīsa's parents and teachers, conveyors of the "truth" and of what is "normative" and "right". All interaction between the self and the other consists in strictly vertical relationships, which tells us much about the structure of Coptic society, since vertical relationships speak of stratified, hierarchical, patriarchal systems. Coptic society is also shown to be regulated and reinforced by a rather repressive ideology, using strategies of scaring (*tarhīb*) and enticement (*targhīb*).[27] Examples of this may be seen in the following:

> And, every evening, they would gather once more and chant a nightly hymn together, until they came to these two lines:
>
> "If illness should come in the night, or something fearful draw near,
> Strengthen my heart, O my Joy, and cure my spirit, O Healer."
>
> Anīsa felt fear and terror as she faced the night. She sensed she was entering a cave, and that she did not know what the result [of this] would be. Then, as soon as she went to bed, she knelt to say a prayer that she had learned by heart, asking God to protect her from "the snakes and scorpions and all the forces of evil", which she understood as a sentence, and not word for word — which was just how she understood the hymn. Thus, she used to imagine that the night was full of scorpions, snakes and thieves, and that only these muttered words would save her from all of these terrors.[28]

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[27] These are terms used in the analysis of Qur'anic discourse, and are used in their sociological context in Halim Barakat's *The Arab World: Society, Culture and State* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), p. 118.

[28] "Anīsa", p. 70.

> Her mother screamed at her instantly, threatening that if she said this once more she would go to hell, "where the maggots would eat her".[29]
>
> [...] an image of horrible punishment settled in Anīsa's mind, be it in the form of death, or of a fire that never goes out, or of maggots that never die, or of a divine eye that never sleeps. This punishment was for all who lie, curse or swear falsely in God's name, and it was inevitable that she, having been tempted by Satan from time to time, would be among them.[30]

Yet there is another, less tangible, other in the narrative. Combining in the forces of evil and sin, it takes the imagined form of Satan, internalising itself in Anīsa's instinctive, infantile ego. In reality, Anīsa is not a sinful child, and on the whole her naughtiness is limited to trivial misdemeanours, such as swearing and telling innocuous lies. After her betrayal of 'Ajīb, however, she fears that she will be sent to hell, since she has been taught that this is the punishment awaiting sinners and evildoers such as herself. It is this which brings about what the narrator describes as "a severe personal crisis",[31] which is in effect a crisis of personal identity, since Anīsa cannot reconcile her rebellious, infantile ego with her emergent moral conscience, or superego. Nor can she reconcile her egoistic act of treachery with her obligations to the group which shapes and supports her, namely her family and, on a wider scale, the Coptic collectivity. The breakdown that Anīsa experiences in the text is an externalisation of this identity crisis, her psychic disorientation reflecting her moral and emotional struggles with 'Ajīb, with the group, with God, and with herself.

Two last points may be made about the narrative self, the first of which concerns the "theory" of narrative identity it supports. Essentially, the narrative self appears to consist in a hybrid of different elements: those representing the pre-Enlightenment mind/soul dialectic; those representing the Cartesian mind/body dialectic; and those representing the psychological interplay of the ego and the superego. It is this hybridity which supports the idea of Anīsa as a self-in-process. The influence of Freud is also particularly prominent, most notably in the narrative's allusions to the primitive

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[29] Ibid., p. 71.
[30] Ibid., p. 72.
[31] Ibid., p. 73.

instincts of the *id*. Indeed, "Anīsa" might even be described as a classic Freudian narrative structure, which, according to Roy Schafer, begins with:

> [...] the infant and young child as a beast, otherwise known as the *id*, and ends with the beast domesticated, tamed by frustration in the course of development in a civilization hostile to its nature. Even though this taming leaves each person with two regulatory structures, the *ego* and *superego*, the protagonist remains in part beast, the carrier of the "indestructible *id*".[32]

The second point concerns the dominance of the collective self over the individual self, a theme which is reproduced throughout all of the stories during this period. This phenomenon might be explained by the prevailing political situation, and the desire for national unity as inspired by the revolution. While shown at times to be excessively controlling and even repressive, the collectivity is nonetheless foregrounded as a site of belonging, the social bonds it engenders forming the individual's basic security system. We may see this in the scene of Anīsa's breakdown, when the narrator tells us: "By crying, it was as though she was trying to alert this group of people, so that they would gather around her and protect her from 'the eye of God'."[33] It is due to the dominance of the collectivity that the potentially destabilising impulses of the individual are kept in check, since this not only ensures that this dominance is sustained, but also that the collectivity is smoothly-run and harmonious. The wider socio-political significance of this becomes apparent when we consider that this was a period of some uncertainty in Egypt, with the new regime embroiled in resolving its leadership problems and securing its legal and moral authority.

The Shaping of a "Coptic" Discourse

To look at the narrative and discourse of "Anīsa", it is useful, as always, to begin with the narrator. Gone is the intrusive, opinionated narrative voice found in stories such as "al-Qayẓ" and "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa", to be replaced by a non-intrusive, anonymous, omniscient narrator, who takes us deep into the workings of Anīsa's

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[32] Roy Schafer, "Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue", in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 26-27.

mind, heart and conscience. While keeping an impersonal distance from the events of the narrative and making no subjective comments or moral judgements, the narrator is nonetheless clear in his sympathy for Anīsa, and guides the reader's responses to her predicament accordingly. While we know nothing about the narrator in terms of his gender or relationship to Anīsa, we can establish with some certainty that he is an adult, for he has the knowledge to make us aware of the dramatic irony of Anīsa's situation, assuring us that she is not really evil, but merely a naughty child with normal, mischievous tendencies. The narrator presents his discourse through the use of conventional language and simple syntax, appropriate to an infantile drama about family life. This also gives a "story-telling" tone to the narration, which is reproduced in the various settings of the text, such as in the family gatherings and classroom scenes, where Anīsa listens to Bible stories. This "story-telling" tone is not didactic, but lends a shared, "homely" quality to the text, giving the impression that it is directed towards a group of (implicit) narratees, rather than merely to an individual.

To turn to the structure of the narrative discourse, we may see that it is ordered according to sets of oppositions, such as moral/immoral, good/evil, innocence/sin, honesty/dishonesty, loyalty/betrayal, with the first term always promoted at the expense of the second. This binaristic structure is apparent in the following:

> For, by various means, they had taught her [Anīsa] at this early age that there is truth and dishonesty, that there is good and evil, that there are angels and demons, that there is Paradise and Hell, and that there is black and white. And they had explained to her where she should stand, and what awaits her should she deviate.[34]

These binarisms illustrate the hierarchical structure of Anīsa's community, and the vertical nature of her familial and social relationships. They also suggest a rigidity within the established order, and the understanding that these principles should not be overturned or compromised. In particular, the structure of Anīsa's household and

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[33] "Anīsa", p. 77.
[34] Ibid., p. 71.

community are patriarchal, as, indeed, is the national community itself, united under the "father" of the modern republic, Nasser.

A salient feature of the narrative is its intertextuality, consisting largely in allusions to Biblical exempla and archetypes, which serve to highlight a number of ideological/moral themes. Among the most prominent of these archetypes is the dove, a symbol of peace, love and — frequently — the Holy Spirit. In its Biblical context, the dove appears at the end of the flood, which had been a punishment from God for humankind's shortcomings. Thus, the arrival of the dove in Anīsa's household is seen as a good omen, signifying bright future prospects after a period of dishonour and hardship, which we may interpret (albeit loosely) as an allegory for the revolution. Another Biblical archetype is Judas, Jesus' betrayer, who is a metaphor for treachery and greed in all of their forms. Judas is also ideologically significant, since the narrative stresses that "Christ loved all of his disciples",[35] emphasising the principle of equality, and suggesting that Judas' betrayal of Christ was also a betrayal of all who followed him. Again, this may be seen to allude to the egalitarian ethic underpinning the concept of Egyptian nationalism, and re-affirms the predominance of the collectivity. Lastly, the text refers to the Biblical figures of Ananias and Sapphira, who are also symbolically significant in that they deceived, withheld money from, and lied to Peter, their example being another warning against betrayal and material greed.[36]

It has been mentioned that "Anīsa" has a "homely" tone, a fact which is also supported by the author's use of space and place. There are two narrative settings in the text, the home and the school, both of which are exclusively Coptic spaces, and which are again perceived as sites of security and belonging. Unusually, this relatively peaceful scene of domesticity even extends to Cairo itself; the capital's noise, crowds and squalor never intrude on this narrative, as they do so commonly in al-Shārūnī's other texts. Rather, we are presented with the following scene of serenity: "Yesterday

[35] Ibid., p. 70.

evening before dinner, the family was sitting on the north side of the balcony, its members enjoying the fresh, invigorating breeze as they stayed up chatting."[37] Clearly, this text represents a far less fraught, violent and angst-ridden environment than those found in earlier short stories, such as "al-Qayẓ", "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa" and "al-Ḥidhā'".

It is interesting to consider al-Shārūnī's relationship to "Anīsa" in view of his own biographical background. Certainly, as the son of a clergyman coming from a solid, middle-class family, we sense that he is sensitive to the themes and morals in this text, and that he is well-versed in all aspects of Coptic religious instruction. Yet, in spite of his upbringing, al-Shārūnī tends to be diffident in his use of "Christian" themes and existents, "Anīsa" being one of only two short stories he has written featuring solely Coptic characters and settings.[38] The fact that he foregrounds Coptic rituals, symbols, terms, traditions and customs in this text is significant, since this appears to reflect the general mood of confidence shared by most Egyptians during this period, inspired by the new regime's egalitarian ideology. Thus, in spite of its seemingly exclusivist nature, "Anīsa" is also a nationalistic text, for, as critics such as Sāmī Khashaba have noted, it makes a valuable contribution to one dimension of Egypt's "national" literature that had formerly been lacking: the Coptic dimension.[39] As such, this is not an exclusivist text, but a self-confident celebration of Egypt's social and cultural diversity, and brings a "marginal" literary discourse into the "canon" of national literature.

Besides giving insight into the construction of the Coptic identity, "Anīsa" also hints at some of the author's own attitudes towards Coptic institutions and values.

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[36] See *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Acts 5:1-10.

[37] "Anīsa", p. 73.

[38] In fact, throughout his career, al-Shārūnī has undoubtedly produced more Muslim characters, or at the very least characters of indeterminate faith, with generic Arabic names and no obvious indicators of religious identity.

[39] Sāmī Khashaba, "al-Baḥth 'an al-Jamāl wa'l-Ḥaqīqa al-Muzdawija" ("The Search for Beauty and Two-Fold Truth"), in Faraj, op. cit., p. 207.

Notably, it builds on themes that lurk in the unconscious of stories like "Jasad min Ṭīn", such as the theme of rebellion against religion's more repressive tendencies. In particular, the text appears to call into question the methods used in Anīsa's instruction, such as the tales and other tactics designed to scare her into obedience. In fact, if we take Anīsa's family as a sort of Coptic collectivity in miniature, the text presents us with the image of a rather strict society, where dissent from the norm is not tolerated, and usually punished. Thus, beneath this harmonious domestic scene of piety and unity, the narrative discourse also ironically reveals the concealed intolerance and hypocrisy of Anīsa's role models (her parents), the main victim of which is the family's boy-servant, 'Ajīb:

> The boy was terrified, as his mistress let out another scream: "Why did you do this? Why did you go near the nest, you heartless delinquent?" The other members of the family drew near at her screaming, Anīsa among them. Naṣīfa, the elder sister, cried: "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost! What's happened?", as the servant shrieked, swearing that he had not gone near the nest, but that he had found the chick, thrown to the ground. Because he had lied before, his mistress beat him, doubling his punishment each time he swore his innocence.
>
> Shafīq, the eldest son, yelled: "Shut up, you liar!", while the father said: "We will forgive you if you tell the truth." The only "truth" was that 'Ajīb should blame himself for what had happened to the nest, but the boy insisted that he had not meddled with anything.[40]
>
> It was not possible that one of Madam Umm Shafīq's children might be a liar, so she rounded once more on the boy, and said: "You are going to teach our children to lie!" Anīsa stood, watching what was happening, not only feeling that she had lied, but that an innocent boy was being punished in her place.[41]

Also ironic is the fact that these examples undermine the ideals of harmony and unity underpinning the text, particularly within the context of the Coptic collectivity itself.

What we may also ascertain from this text is that, during this period of social and political transition, there were shifts in power within the Coptic (and indeed the greater, national) community. In particular, respect for traditional figures of authority was declining, while social behaviour and attitudes were transforming accordingly,

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[40] "Anīsa", p. 75.

especially among the younger generation. An example of this might be seen in Anīsa's innocent attempts to test the boundaries of the traditions and values of her elders (if only unconsciously), and in the way in which the discourse undermines their perceived moral wisdom.

Al-'Intīl has argued that "Anīsa" is a moralistic story, or "pedagogical, to be precise".[42] I do not agree wholeheartedly with this assessment, and would argue that al-Shārūnī's motives are not purely to play the didactic role of moral instructor, but also to subtly discuss the many ideological issues embedded in the narrative, which, in my view, are of deeper significance than its superficial moral themes. For it is only by examining the text's ideological discourse that we find a genuine critique of Coptic society and identity, and of the various national issues which the narrative addresses, such as the predominance of the collective self, social equality, respect and co-operation.

2. "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl" ("Two in Holy Matrimony"), 1955

With the demise of the Wafd after the revolution, Egypt's Copts lost their main channel for political self-expression. As a result, they had two choices: either to turn in on themselves in order to protect themselves and their interests, or to embrace the possibilities of the new regime, and this new stage in Egypt's history. Al-Shārūnī, for one, chose the second option, and backed the revolutionary regime with hope and enthusiasm, as is clear from this next text, "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl". Following on from "Jasad min Ṭīn" and "Anīsa", "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl" delves deeper into the lives of the Egyptian Copts, exploring the customs and rituals of Coptic culture, particularly those relating to betrothals, marriages and deaths. A second, ideological, dimension to the text is its portrayal of the state of relations between the Copts and their Muslim neighbours, a relationship which is shown to be harmonious and cohesive. Unfailingly optimistic, the narrative offers an imaginative vision of a society founded on mutual

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[41] Ibid., p. 75.

respect and tolerance, shared goals, equality and a sense of national unity. Perhaps uniquely, al-Shārūnī also seems to have set out to create a text here which contains both Muslim and Christian characters, but which ultimately privileges neither faith.[43]

"Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl" centres on a small Coptic family and their Muslim neighbours, who live together in a Cairo apartment block. The Muslim narrator of the text, Ṣiddīqa, relates the drama of how her Christian friend, Basīṭa, finally finds a husband after years of being single. Basīṭa had developed a problem, or "complex",[44] for although she had received a number of marriage offers in the past, she had rejected them, so as to continue caring for her two younger brothers. Now, at the age of thirty-five, she fears she has gone beyond the age where a man might wish to marry her. Conscious of the sacrifice Basīṭa has made for her family, Ḥabīb, the elder of her two brothers, agrees to an arranged marriage based on the principle of "exchange", whereby he and Basīṭa marry another brother-sister couple. This arrangement is the source of much speculation, for, while the beautiful Basīṭa is considered more than a match for her rather dull fiancé, 'Iryān Afandī, Ḥabīb's betrothed, Dimyāna, is a far less inviting prospect. Ṣiddīqa describes her first encounter with Dimyāna as follows:

> A few moments later, 'Iryān Afandī and a woman entered. Had she not been wearing a woman's dress and shoes, I would not have taken her for a woman, or even for a human. She appeared to be in her forties, her head was mounted on two protruding veins, and she didn't have a face — may God forgive me — but rather a huge nose, with what looked like eyes and a mouth set around it. I don't like to mock a person's physique (for I have four daughters, all of whom are at the age of marrying), but when I shook her hand in greeting, I felt it was the hand of an ape or a monkey![45]

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[42] Al-'Intīl, op. cit., p. 127.

[43] As such, the text appears to be influenced by the new regime's decision to promote a common, national identity over narrower group (e.g. sectarian) identities. It may also reflect the government's moves towards secularisation, expressed most forcibly in the abolition of the religious (*sharī'a*) courts in the year this story was written.

[44] "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl", p. 100 ff.

[45] Ibid., pp. 101-102.

Nonetheless, Ḥabīb and Dimyāna's engagement (*janbayūt*)[46] takes place, and the ensuing wedding preparations are made, in spite of Ṣiddīqa's sense of foreboding at this pairing.

Almost inevitably, tragedy strikes on the morning of Ḥabīb's wedding: he goes to the tailor's to collect his suit, and dies of a heart attack in the taxi on his way home. Basīṭa's wedding is cancelled and Ḥabīb's funeral is held, after which Basīṭa and her family observe the forty days' period of mourning. But even once this mourning period has passed, 'Iryān Afandī does not mention any plans to reschedule his marriage to Basīṭa, and Ṣiddīqa fears that he will renege on the deal, as he seeks to find a compromise that will appease his ill-fated sister. Unable to contain her frustration, Ṣiddīqa decides to intervene, and persuades 'Iryān Afandī to commit himself to Basīṭa. Unusually for al-Shārūnī, the story closes with a firmly-resolved, happy ending, with Dimyāna giving her consent for her brother to marry, albeit in the knowledge that she will be left single, perhaps permanently. In this way, Dimyāna emerges as both the heroine and the saviour of the tale.

The Self and the Other as a Complementary Whole

While lacking psychological complexity, the actors of "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl" enjoy multi-dimensional narrative identities. Generally speaking, two main indicators of identity emerge — religion and gender — which the author foregrounds at different points in the text. Thus we find that Basīṭa and Ṣiddīqa are oppositional symbols for their Coptic and Muslim communities respectively, while also sharing a common female identity. Likewise, Ḥabīb and Dimyāna are gender opposites sharing a common, Coptic religious identity. What is interesting is that the text appears to privilege no form of identity at the expense of any other, making it difficult for the reader to identify a *primary* narrative self. For, while Basīṭa is unquestionably the main focus of the narrative, she cannot claim the distinction of being the primary narrative self, if only

[46] The official engagement ceremony held in accordance with the rites of the Coptic church.

because her potential for action is too limited. By contrast, the dramatised narrator Ṣiddīqa, and even a relatively peripheral character such as Basīṭa's future sister-in-law Dimyāna, possess greater agency and scope for initiating narrative transformation, although neither one of these two women is the primary narrative self.

What this signifies is that there is a principle of egalitarianism shaping the text and informing its discourse. For, rather than present the self and the other as distinct and irreconcilable opposites, al-Shārūnī attempts to show how they form the composite parts of a complementary whole. While Ṣiddīqa is (overtly) Basīṭa's Muslim other, al-Shārūnī sets out to emphasise the characteristics and conditions they share. Indeed, as a stronger, more knowledgeable and more authoritative character, who is more capable of agency than her Coptic neighbour, Ṣiddīqa is also a side of Basīṭa's self which does not — or cannot — find its own full expression. It may even be argued that, in spite of the incidental facts of their different personalities, appearances and temperaments, the women of the text are all one single, female self. In order to illustrate this, it will be helpful to look at each woman in turn.

First and foremost is Basīṭa, who, as her name suggests, is simple, uncomplicated, trusting and "good-hearted, sometimes to the point of naïveté".[47] While physically attractive, she is not very well educated, and in her innocence and unworldliness has the ambiguous appeal of a "child-woman". Basīṭa is defined principally by her "remarkable beauty",[48] her compliant nature, and her socially-determined "female" roles of sister, wife, surrogate mother and caretaker. This is particularly evident in her relationship to Ḥabīb, which appears to contain elements of all these:

> Her brother Ḥabīb was one year younger and worked as a teacher at Qaṭr al-Nadā secondary school. Her mother had died when Ḥabīb was a university student, since when Basīṭa had taken care of him just as though she were his mother. She would stay up late with him on the nights before exams, preparing him tea and snacks; she travelled with him to Upper Egypt when he

[47] "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl", p. 99.
[48] She is described as being "fair-skinned and slim-built". Ibid., p. 99.

> graduated and was appointed there, then went to live with him when he was transferred to Cairo.[49]

Her two female others are similarly defined: Ṣiddīqa is primarily a mother and a home-maker, while Dimyāna is a sister and, most notably, a spinster. A burden to her family on account of her ugly face, she is a distinctly less appealing type of child-woman than Basīṭa.

As we can see, despite their idiosyncratic differences, there is a consistency in the construction of the female characters which corresponds to the narrative ethos of harmony and unity. For example, at no point is Ṣiddīqa's Muslim identity a point of conflict with Basīṭa; there is nothing to suggest any hostility or antagonism between them, and Ṣiddīqa is notable only for her loyalty and support. A source of comfort and wisdom to her less experienced friend, Ṣiddīqa too is a mother figure, and is even considered "one of the family". As she explains:

> Despite my being no more than ten years older, she made me feel that I had taken the place of her mother, and always called me "Mama Ṣiddīqa" (with a double "d"). She would seek my advice on various matters that concerned her: she rarely chose a dress without knowing what I thought of it first, or picked earrings or a necklace without me being with her.[50]

Even Dimyāna, a relative stranger to Basīṭa, who is perceived to be the source of everybody's afflictions, is shown to have no fundamental points of difference,[51] and is ultimately as good-hearted and self-sacrificing as her peers.

In all, it may be said that, rather than searching for or foregrounding difference, this text emphasises a common sense of identity, shared among all of its characters. Interaction between the self and the other is positive and total, with the story ending happily with reconciliation on all counts. Even in matters of potential cultural

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[49] Ibid., p. 99.
[50] Ibid., p. 99.
[51] Overlooking the fact of her ugly appearance.

difference, such as the religious distinction between Basīṭa and Ṣiddīqa, points in common are searched for, as in the scene at Ḥabīb's funeral:

> We went to the church that day, to pray over his dead body. This time, I saw the deacons and the precentor carrying out their funerary rites. Then the priest got up to preach, and I listened to him make a statement which seemed similar to what the preacher in our mosque says on such occasions ("... for this is the will of God, and we must show courage and not surrender to despair"), only he repeated the words "Christ Our Lord" two or three times in his sermon.[52]

It is clear that culture and tradition — particularly that stemming from the intersection of religion with patriarchism — are the main factors structuring the identities of the characters. Religious identity is expressed most forcibly in the enactment of rituals, such as prayers and the ceremonies for engagements, weddings and funerals, while for the Muslims there are also references to the conventions of fasting. As we have seen, gender identity is constructed most conclusively around social roles, which, in view of Egyptian women's rather limited public role at this time, means that the female characters are confined almost exclusively to the home. Another structuring factor, which will be discussed in more detail below, is the ideal of national unity and its relationship to national identity, which finds its origins in the socio-political context of the period.

The Text as an Embodiment of Nationalist Ideology

While "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl" cannot be described as an especially experimental text, certain aspects of its structure and form are worth mentioning here, due to the ways in which they support its ideological ethos and discourse. Clearly nationalist in orientation, "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl" is informed by a particularly post-revolutionary spirit, and is inspired by the principles of liberation, egalitarianism and nation-building. At the unconscious level, there are clear indications that the author desires and wishes to validate the ideals of social equality and national unity articulated in the rhetoric of the new regime, hence his portrayal of a diverse but fundamentally cohesive community,

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[52] "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl", pp. 106-107.

whose members all exist as one happy, united family.[53] Avoiding the unsubtleties of much of the more propagandist fiction of this period, the text gives substance to its ideological ideal via the narratological devices and techniques described below.

Consisting in a simple summary of events, "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl" begins during a visit by the narrator to Basīṭa's home. The style of the narrative is simple and uncomplicated, using unpoetic language with little metaphor or imagery. In many ways, Ṣiddīqa's use of conventional, simple syntax appears to take its cue from the name of its central character, and expresses Ṣiddīqa's sense of affinity and empathy with her.[54] This spirit of empathy is reinforced by the use of dialogue in the colloquial, allowing for a little local colour, and a common sense of "Egyptianness" and classless-ness among the characters.[55] Occasional interjections and exaggerations (such as we find in note 45 above), contribute to something verging on a "spoken" narrative style, enhancing the unaffectedness and informality of the text. These serve to emphasise the down-to-earth character and authority of Ṣiddīqa's narration, while also lending it authenticity and sincerity.[56] Thus, it presents an image of a simple, harmonious world, where there are few cares or doubts, and where problems are easily put right.

In the light of the above, a few structural and formal devices are worth examining. First is the structural aspect to the action between the self and the other, which works in parallels, squares and triangles, signifying reciprocity, co-operation and union. The ideological implications of this feature are self-evident:

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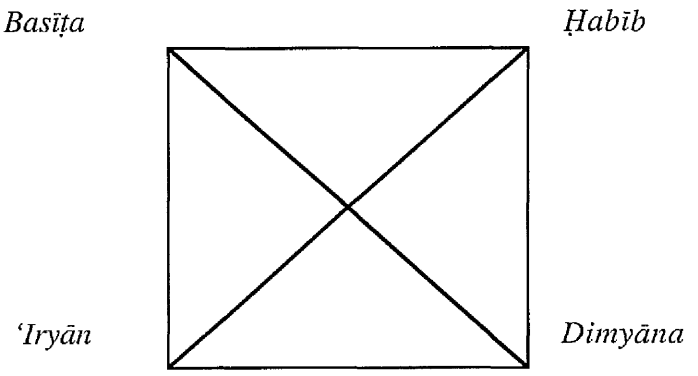
[53] To illustrate this point, Ṣiddīqa describes how Basīṭa persuades her and her family to stay for food after the engagement party, although the Muslim family is fasting and wishes to rest before taking the *saḥūr*. As Basīṭa says to Ṣiddīqa: "We are one family. It would be a shame for you to go like this without us eating together." Ibid., p. 104.

[54] "Basīṭa", as we have seen, means "simple", or "uncomplicated".

[55] In fact, the title of the story finds its origins in the colloquial expression: *yā bakht mīn waffa' rāsayn fi'l-ḥalāl*, or "How lucky is the one who joins two in holy matrimony".

[56] Again, this finds interesting parallels in the choice of Ṣiddīqa's name, which means "strictly veracious or honest".



Another feature of the text is its employment of names, which either illustrate particular character types or signify narrative themes. As we have seen, Basīṭa is a "simple" soul, her name corresponding directly to her nature, whereas Muṣṭafā Bayyūmī notes that the name Ṣiddīq (of which Ṣiddīqa is the feminine), relates to someone "who attests to [the truth of] his words by action".[57] Second, the name Ṣiddīqa is a direct indicator of her Muslim faith, since it is a reference to Abu Bakr, the first Muslim Caliph, who is known by the epithet "al-Ṣiddīq".[58] As Bayyumī explains:

> It is not without reason that the character of the friendly Muslim woman, in a story which takes form in a purely Christian environment, bears such a meaningful name as this. Nor is it without reason that the character desires to "clarify" her name, in order to assure us of her role and her artistic function: "[...] she made me feel that I had taken the place of her mother, and always called me 'Mama Ṣiddīqa' (with a double 'd')." She is not simply a "friend" (*ṣadīqa*, without a double "d"), but a "truthful friend" (*ṣiddīqa*), a loyal advisor and a warm character, expressing the total social harmony among Muslims and Christians in the story.[59]

'Iryān Afandī is another character whose name bears associations. A colloquial corruption of the classical *'uryān*, in its literal sense this name means "naked". It is symbolically significant in the context of this story, in that it describes the individual without the social or hierarchical markers of clothing, again stressing the equality and

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[57] Muṣṭafā Bayyūmī, *Mu'jam Asmā' Qiṣaṣ Yūsuf al-Shārūnī: Dirāsa Taḥlīliyya* [*A Lexicon of Names in the Stories of Yūsuf al-Shārūnī: An Analytical Study*] (Cairo: Markaz al-Ḥaḍāra al-'Arabiyya, 1999) p. 55.

[58] In the same way, the name Ḥabīb, which has the literal meaning "beloved", is also an epithet for Jesus Christ, and is an indicator of Ḥabīb's faith.

[59] Bayyūmī, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

classless-ness among the characters. From a particularly Christian perspective,[60] nakedness symbolises humanity in its primal state, and the innocence of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. Nakedness is also suggestive of the newborn, which, in its state of vulnerability, is entirely at the mercy of higher powers or forces. Considered within the context of the ideological discourse, this nakedness is a metaphor for the Egyptian nation-state in its infancy, an egalitarian utopia shaped by mutual hopes and dreams.[61]

The last name to be looked at here is Dimyāna, an explicitly Christian name of Greek origin, meaning "the triumphant" or "the victor, supported by divine power".[62] Seemingly ironic — when considered in the light of Dimyāna's off-putting ugliness and chronic misfortune — it does in fact foretell her greatness and goodness, and the correctness and magnanimity of her actions and intentions. Albeit subtle, the fact that Dimyāna is "supported by divine power" could also be an allusion to Christ himself, an allusion we find also in Basīṭa's brother, Ḥabīb. Perhaps appropriately for these two characters, the love they discover is chaste and non-sexual, and is a higher form of love or "bond of companionship", which, as in so many of the stories al-Shārūnī produced during this period, is "born at the hearts of families".[63]

Another feature of ideological significance is al-Shārūnī's use of narrative space and place. The apartment block in Cairo which the two families inhabit is a utopian microcosm of Egyptian society, with its two main religious communities living side by side, enjoying a modest but enriching existence based on mutual support and understanding. Notably, movement between the two flats is free and unlimited, to the point where each space is almost an extension of the other. What is more, al-Shārūnī reconfigures textual space here to inscribe and describe, rather than merely to

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[60] It should be noted that the name 'Iryān is used solely in the Coptic community.
[61] The name given to Ṣiddīqa's eldest daughter is Āmāl, or "hopes".
[62] Bayyūmī, op. cit., p. 38.
[63] Ḥaqqī, op. cit., p. 226.

circumscribe, the condition of the middle-class Coptic woman.[64] We might also argue that there is ideological intent in the author's use of narrative time: the text moves steadily and fluidly in a chronological, linear progression, with closure satisfactorily attained at the end. If we set the fictional action against the backdrop of the early post-revolutionary period, we may see how this seeks to represent a confident, cohesive and forward-looking society, fuelled by a shared sense of national history and destiny. It also goes some way towards explaining the characters' motivations: united by a (perhaps idealised) sense of the common good, these brothers, sisters and neighbours help each other out unconditionally.

Ironically, in spite of the author's determination to stress the common Egyptianness of the characters in this text, in many ways its representations of the Coptic faith and culture expose the myth of this idealised, unified society, for there are many aspects of the story which may seem alien or exotic to the Muslim reader. Nonetheless, it is perhaps with a view to addressing this fact that al-Shārūnī uses the text as a means of instructing the Muslim majority and raising its consciousness of Coptic culture, through a subtle balancing of points of difference and a process of demystification. Certain critics have commented on the success of this approach, such as Haqqī, who writes:

> In "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl" one finds a precise description of life in a Coptic family, and of its traditions [relating to] engagement and marriage. One of the indications of the author's skill in his craft is that he narrates the life of this Coptic family to us through a Muslim neighbour, so as to make you feel at ease with her as you look out on an unfamiliar world. And I can confirm that, for the first time, I became acquainted with Coptic terms that I had known nothing of before.[65]

Even Western critics, to all intents versed in the traditions of Christianity, make similar remarks; Vial notes, with reference to this text, that al-Shārūnī "has much to

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[64] Cf., by way of contrast, "Jasad min Ṭīn" in Chapter One.
[65] Ḥaqqī, op. cit., pp. 224-225.

teach us about the Coptic *petite bourgeoisie* from which he descends".[66] This demonstrates that the text is as "exotic" for Western Christians as it is for Arab Muslims, for in it al-Shārūnī constructs an image of a purely indigenous form of Christianity (much as he did in "Anīsa" one year previously), and no longer gives reference to the Christianity of the West, as he did in texts such as "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis". The reasons for this reversion to local Christianity are clear: in a newly-independent, post-colonial society, there would have been no need or incentive to seek examples from a culture which for so long denied Egyptians — Copt or Muslim — the means for authentic self-expression.

Although al-Shārūnī attempts to give voice to Egypt's Coptic minority, this nonetheless undermines his ideal of an egalitarian society, since it reminds us that — even after the revolution — the discourse of domination was still profoundly Muslim. For, although the focus of the narrative action is on a Christian family, it is nonetheless subject to a dominant Muslim discourse, given voice through a "legitimising" Muslim narrator. Interestingly, the text does contain some subtle subversions of this paradigm, as in the positioning of the families in their respective apartments, which puts the Christians "over" their Muslim neighbours, thereby stressing their ability to transcend their subalternity. While barely discernable at a surface reading, this tentative attempt at decentring the dominant discourse hints at a new confidence among Egypt's minorities, although there is no indication of any desire here to subvert the status quo.

Another element which exposes the myth of egalitarianism is the proliferation of gender hierarchies embedded in the narrative, confirming the persisting reality of women's subject position to men. Examples in the text are numerous, such as Basīṭa's decision to put her brothers' needs before her own; the objectification of Basīṭa and Dimyāna; the attitudes of both sexes towards marriage, which is seen to legitimise the

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[66] Vial, op. cit., p. 142.

woman, to give her meaning, wholeness and status, and to relieve her of a future of desexualised spinsterhood. Witness Dimyāna's joy when she finally gets engaged:

> On the night of Dimyāna's engagement ceremony, I remarked on the futility of all she had done to hide the ugliness of her form, and look like a bride should. The entire time I was saying to myself: "By God, girls, she looks hideous ... ." Nevertheless, I went to congratulate her, and she seemed as delighted as a girl of twenty as she replied: "May Āmāl and the rest of your children be next."[67]

While women are certainly stereotyped in this text, it should be stressed that they are not necessarily exploited; again, there are a few subtle subversions of male/female hierarchies in the narrative, notably in the fact that the main agents of its action are the women and not the men. What is also interesting is the way in which al-Shārūnī uses women's realities to speak of national realities, by making an association between the subject position of Egypt's women and its minorities, most specifically the Copts. In the same way, the collective identity of the women speaks of the national identity in the post-independence period; there is a strong consciousness of and rooting in tradition, yet with a tentative spirit of openness and a new-found willingness to consider change. There are also some indications that the women of the text are ready to put certain social conventions or attitudes into question, although demonstrating no real willingness to challenge or confront them, something which may be said of the nation as a whole at this time.[68]

3. "Al-Nās Maqāmāt" ("Every One Has His Place"), 1956

The question of an egalitarian society need not be confined to a discussion of sectarian difference, as the next short story demonstrates. "Al-Nās Maqāmāt" illustrates the dynamics of class relations after the revolution, and exposes the chimera of the new regime's so-called "classless society".[69] Related from the perspective of the Egyptian

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[67] "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl", p. 103.

[68] Cf. also "Risāla ilā Imra'a" and "Nāhid wa Nabīl".

[69] This theme was also explored in 1956 by the Egyptian playwright Nu'mān 'Ashūr (1918-87), in his play *al-Nās illī Taḥt* (*The People Downstairs*).

petite bourgeoisie, the story focuses on the socio-economics of love and marriage, into which are woven recurring themes relating to patterns of social organisation, such as class and family hierarchies.[70]

It was the new regime's drive towards modernisation, and its opening up of the education system, which brought about many of the new opportunities for social mobility, and the emergence of new social groupings and elites. However, the modernisation process also accentuated existing differences between groups and classes. Thus, despite its visible expansion during this period, the internal restructuring of the Egyptian bourgeoisie rendered it at the same time more complex and far less homogeneous. One aspect of middle-class life which continued apace, however, was the tendency of the members of the *grande bourgeoisie* towards Westernisation, in terms of their lifestyle, behaviour and attitudes. Inevitably, their actions were aspired to and often emulated by their immediate social inferiors. As one commentator observed at this time:

> As a whole, the students in the universities come from small towns and villages, the sons of the more timorous and conservative lower middle class. They initiate themselves — so to speak — into the occidental way of life through contact with their richer colleagues, and not only through American films (for too often Egyptian films imitate the latter), which introduce them to the interiors of the sumptuous apartments of millionaires.[71]

"Al-Nās Maqāmāt" supplies us with a faithful illustration of the complexities of class transformation during this period. Its narrator, Sāmī, is a lower middle-class insurance salesman, whose best friend, Nabīl, is his wealthy employer's son. For much of his life, Sāmī has idolised and attempted to model himself on Nabīl, in a vain attempt to dissociate himself from his humble origins. He relates how, as a schoolboy,

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[70] For an interesting discussion of Egypt's *petite bourgeoisie* in the post-war period, their domestic arrangements, chosen professions, social relations and some intellectual and ideological trends, see Raoul Makarius' *La jeunesse intellectuelle d'Égypte au lendemain de la deuxième guerre mondiale* (Paris: Mouton, 1960).

[71] Ibid., p. 37.

he would tell lies and invent schemes so as to procure extra money with which to impress Nabīl and his friends:

> I was forced to lie — to cheat — so as to get more than the two piastres I had asked them for. Once I pretended that they were forcing us at school to pay ten piastres to some charitable organisation, when in fact they were only asking us to pay five. That day I got together with Nabīl, Tharwat and 'Iṣām, and we drank Coca-Cola and smoked cigarettes together.
>
> Another time I pretended that I had broken a test-tube in the lab, and that I had been asked to pay a fine of fifteen piastres. It was clear this time that I had picked a rotten excuse, because I had to listen to a long lecture from my father about negligence and its consequences, and to another from my mother about our financial situation. The important thing was that I had secured the fifteen piastres. That day, I was able to invite my three friends for a Coca-Cola, and to smoke cigarettes, too. This made me feel equal to those in a class where neither piastres nor pounds are of any consequence.[72]

As the narrative unfolds, we become aware of the extent of Sāmī's frustration, as he compares his schoolmates' luxurious lifestyles with his own modest existence. He despises his parents for their struggles and sacrifices: on one occasion he remarks that his father was recently promoted to the post of chief clerk, then proceeds to dismiss him as "an employee, like so many tens of others".[73] Sāmī's sense of social inferiority is such that, from the obstreperous adolescent with a chip on his shoulder, emerges an angry and bitter young man, determined to be beholden to no-one but himself. When Sāmī first starts selling life insurance, this is as much due to his desire to earn money, as to his desire to rid himself of feeling obliged towards his parents:

> I began to look for work — any work. Work had no meaning for me other than that I would get a wage at the end of the month, that I would have money of my own to spend as I pleased, and that I would not be forced into humiliating myself, lying (which was sometimes discovered), or screaming and making threats (on most occasions to no avail).[74]
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> My finding work was both in my interest and theirs. For my part, I would have my own private income which I could spend as I liked, and for theirs, this would lighten the burden of paying for me.[75]

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[72] "Al-Nās Maqāmāt", pp. 67-68.
[73] Ibid., p. 67.
[74] Ibid., pp. 69-70.
[75] Ibid., p. 70.

Although Sāmī soon establishes himself as an asset to the company, he remains preoccupied by the fact that it was his father who got him his job, and by the continued influence of his friend Nabīl. We may see this in the following passage, where Nabīl invites Sāmī to the ballet:

> Perhaps I accepted the invitation in commemoration of an old friendship, or so that I could get to know someone who, before long, would be one of the most senior employees in the company. Or perhaps it was simply [due to] my desire to witness this event, pictures of which I had seen on television and in the newspapers.
>
> Before heading for the Opera House, Nabīl invited me for a light dinner, for which, in an attempt to liberate myself somewhat from my friend's wealth and riches, I tried in vain to pay. I wanted to walk freely alongside him, but I felt as though I were walking behind him.
>
> When we entered the Opera House and Nabīl paid for the tickets, I was seized by a sense of anxiety — the anxiety of an animal trapped inside a cage. I felt as though I shouldn't have accepted this invitation, and that I was exposing myself to feelings I could well have avoided.[76]

"Al-Nās Maqāmāt" is an unusually explicit ideological narrative, which criticises the importance given to socio-economic factors in determining the status and prospects of the Egyptian citizen. As such, it appears to be inspired by and in response to much of the socialist rhetoric of the period.

The Self, the Other and Enduring Class Realities

Sāmī, the protagonist, is the narrative self of this text. A frustrated young man in his early twenties, he is distinguished by his ordinariness: he is the averagely-intelligent son of an office worker of modest income, with mediocre qualifications and unremarkable professional prospects.[77] Excluded and isolated, he appears to belong to no specific social group, viewing his family as "beneath" him and his schoolmates as "above" him. From the perspective of class, Sāmī appears to oscillate between the strata comprising the lower and upper middle classes, reflecting his lack of identification with any social group in particular. On the collective level, this also

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[76] Ibid., pp. 74-75.

[77] Ironically, the name Sāmī means "high" or "exalted", and also bears the meanings "high-ranking" or "superior". Bayyūmī, op. cit., p. 46.

reflects the social and cultural disequilibrium experienced by the Egyptian bourgeoisie at this time.

By necessity, Sāmī is a social chameleon, with a possible array of selves for any number of situations. He is also a self-in-process, and we see him transform at different stages in his social and emotional development. He is distinct from the other characters we have considered in this chapter, in that he fails to find security or a sense of belonging in the collectivity. Thus, he attempts to construct himself in the form of a future-oriented schema of the self *he would like to be*. We may consider Sāmī's identity using the following categories of "self":

ACTUAL SELF	IDEAL SELF	"OUGHT" SELF
• *petit-bourgeois* • of average intelligence, ambitious, hard-working • restricted by family and their limitations	• *grand-bourgeois* • cultivated, successful, professional • self-autonomous, influential, wealthy	• social equal to his friends (e.g. Nabīl) • respected, considered on personal merit • free to make his own life-choices
How he "is"	How he "would like to be"	How he "thinks he should be"

It is as a result of Sāmī's failure to resolve his actual and ideal self that — during his adolescence at least — he is driven constantly to disappointment, sadness and humiliation. Further, his overall failure to resolve his actual and ought self explains his feelings of anxiety, anger and self-loathing.

The various others of the text include Nabīl and his clique of wealthy friends, and Sāmī's sweetheart, Fā'iza, daughter of the office errand-boy. Despite coming from a background of socio-economic hardship, Fā'iza is a modestly refined and intelligent woman. Within his family, Sāmī's most immediate others are his parents, whose authority he seeks constantly to challenge and undermine, and his sister, with whom he is in fierce competition. Out of all of these, Nabīl is arguably the most significant

other, since it is through him that the narrative mediates the theme of Egypt's class relations so forcibly.[78] Like so many of al-Shārūnī's narrative selves, Sāmī is *dependent* on the other for his self-definition and identity, and it is only through Nabīl that he is able to perceive and experience fully:

> I was ashamed of Nabīl seeing my home, for, first and foremost, the street which led to it was filthy. Its people used to compete in pouring dirty water in front of their houses, making little puddles. Nabīl had to avoid them when he came to visit me for the first time. Although this was a familiar sight in my daily life, I only become aware of the extent of its filthiness when Nabīl was with me.[79]

> The first time I visited Nabīl's home — or his villa, to be precise — I was dazzled by the carpets covering the floors of the rooms, and by the large pictures hanging on the walls, and the crystal chandelier suspended from the ceiling. That day, a young Nubian servant offered me a chilled, peeled pomegranate, after which I realised that I had never tasted real pomegranate before.[80]

Even as an adolescent, Nabīl is a powerful and persuasive other, whose influence extends way beyond the boundaries of his group:

> Nabīl had the ability to interrupt any teacher's lesson and make the class roar with laughter, and in such a way that the teacher would not be annoyed. Rather, the teacher would join in with the joke, be it only with a smile. That's because Nabīl's way of speaking and gesticulating could make even Mr. Hāshim, the stern Arabic language teacher, smile in spite of himself, whereas if another student had done it, he would have been punished.[81]

In the case of Sāmī's parents, Nabīl's otherness provokes feelings of inadequacy and fear, causing them to try to convince their son of the "dangers" of keeping such elevated company. As Sāmī explains:

> They began to warn me against being friends with Nabīl and others like him. My mother used to say to me: "Could Nabīl care less whether he fails or succeeds? His father is rich, whereas we are ordinary folk. You must get your degree; it is the only capital from which you can benefit in later life. Pay attention to your studies, Son, and stop fooling around."[82]

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[78] Appropriately, the name Nabīl means "intelligent, noble, exalted, distinguished". Ibid., p. 80.
[79] "Al-Nās Maqāmāt", p. 69.
[80] Ibid., p. 68.
[81] Ibid., p. 68.

The socio-economic and cultural distinctions between Sāmī and Nabīl place an inevitable, and ultimately unbridgeable, distance between them. What is more, this distance appears to widen, rather than narrow, throughout the course of the text, with Sāmī becoming disdainful of Nabīl's *blasé* attitudes, and estranged from his own earlier, now visibly unattainable, ideals. He even becomes resentful of the privileges he once admired; on meeting Nabīl after the latter's long stay in France, Sāmī remarks: "I felt that day that there was a distance growing between myself and my friend: he was in a car and I was on foot; he had come from Paris, while I had never left Cairo; he was the owner of the company, and I was one of its employees."[83] To overcome his feelings of inferiority, Sāmī sets his sights on Fā'iza, the office errand-boy's daughter, to whom he is socially, culturally and intellectually more proximate. By doing so, he is able to realise his dreams of self-advancement, since Fā'iza is the only person to whom he is truly "superior". Ironically, it is this very point which leads Sāmī's parents to refuse to let him marry her, an argument which is later repeated when Nabīl asks Sāmī's family for its permission to marry Sāmīa, Sāmī's sister.

Sāmī's relationship to Sāmīa also merits examination, since we may argue that, although differentiated by the otherness of gender, these characters are once again mirror images of the same narrative self. We may discern this from certain textual clues: both characters possess the same name;[84] both are socially covetous and aspire to a higher social status; and both appear to be alienated (albeit differently) from their elders. For, while Sāmī's frustrations lead him to clash with his parents and complain that he has nothing in common with them, Sāmīa's airs and graces put her at odds with her modest parents, almost leading one to imagine that she has been "raised in a life more delicate and gentle"[85] than that which they have provided. What is notable, however, is that these siblings are not equals. Sāmī, for one, feels that his happiness takes a poor second place to his sister's, and on being denied his parents' permission

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[82] Ibid., p. 70.
[83] Ibid., p. 72.
[84] Sāmīa being the feminine form of Sāmī.

to marry Fā'iza, he takes stock of the truth behind their refusal: "I found myself opposed by my father, mother and sister, because Sāmīa was looking for a husband of high standing, and how would such a husband come to her, if her brother were to marry the errand-boy's daughter?"[86] Similarly, Sāmī is sickened to discover that his parents see no comparison between their objections to him marrying Fā'iza, and Nabīl's parents' objections to their son marrying Sāmīa:

> My father alluded to what had happened yesterday, saying: "If his family objects because we are [only] from an average family, then what would happen if they knew that you were going to marry Fā'iza — daughter of 'Abduh the errand-boy? Even if there were only a glimmer of hope, it would be completely lost!" He went on, defending and explaining the situation again: "Son, because your mother and I have suffered a great deal, and because we want to secure a future for you and your sister, we would be pleased if she were to marry Master Nabīl, but we won't accept that you marry Fā'iza".[87]

It is here that Sāmī's narration loses momentum, since there can be no reconciliation between the self and his various others: the dispute between he and his family ends in deadlock; his love for Fā'iza remains forbidden; and, in spite of Nabīl's appeals for "solidarity" with Sāmī, the distance between them is reinforced by their families' prejudice. The only hint of resolution can be sensed at the very end of the text, when Sāmī feels vindicated at seeing his family fall victim to the same snobbery it has directed against Fā'iza. It is also ironic that Sāmī can only equal his sister in terms of his failings, for although he cannot marry Fā'iza, nor can she marry Nabīl.

Hypocrisy and the Middle-Class Consciousness

In "al-Nās Maqāmāt", we see the optimism of the first two texts in this chapter diminishing rapidly, to be replaced by a mood of discontentment and cynicism. This mood is established from the opening paragraph, where we encounter Sāmī grumbling bitterly about his interfering family:

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[85] "Al-Nās Maqāmāt", p. 69.
[86] Ibid., p. 77.
[87] Ibid., p. 82.

> They were all against me marrying Fā'iza: my mother, my father and my sister Sāmīa. I know that no marriage comes without obstacles or objections (regardless of whether the matter is lawful or forbidden, there are always those who object), but I reckoned that I had reached the age where I myself could choose the wife I wanted. [Then] suddenly I realised: I was merely an individual in a group, a son in a family. I was neither acting independently nor solely responsible for my conduct. Rather, its implications affected my father, mother and sister, and so they had the right to interfere in a matter in which I wish they hadn't.[88]

As in "Anīsa" and "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl", we again find a text that privileges the group over the individual, and which appeals to a collective sense of responsibility to the group. There is more evidence, however, of unease with the collectivity, and its controlling, repressive tendencies are brought more noticeably to the surface of the text. Indeed, in this story, the group assumes ruthless and even tyrannical characteristics; relations are destructive, frustrating and lacking in loyalty, and the desires of the individual are often harshly suppressed.

As its title affirms, "al-Nās Maqāmāt" is unforgiving in its exposé of Egypt's still deeply divided class system. Without exception, all of its characters are social climbers, and seem to labour under the weight of their artifice and hypocrisy. No-one is free of the taint of social prejudice, and almost all of the characters are dishonest and self-contradictory. Even Sāmī, ostensibly the principal victim of the narrative (for there are many), lies and deceives both his family and friends, and considers himself superior to the lowly Fā'iza. Equally, Sāmīa, with her carefully-constructed elegance and refinement, sneers at Fā'iza for having "neither money nor beauty".[89] The greatest snobs — of course — are Sāmī's parents, who, despite the enormous sacrifices they have made for their children, refuse to identify with Fā'iza's father, who has also spent his life securing a future for his child. Their hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness is compounded when we learn that Sāmī's father is the son of an agricultural labourer, but who later became a white-collar worker, upon which he was able to marry the daughter of a civil servant.

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[88] Ibid., p. 66.
[89] Ibid., p. 77

To turn to the language and world-view of the text, we may see how it is shaped by Sāmī's adolescent anecdotes, and his tales of his pursuit of independence and self-advancement. Fittingly "youthful" in tone, his narration contains *skaz*-like elements, presenting characteristics of spoken, rather than written, language. These include the repetition of discourse linkers ("as a matter of fact", "actually"),[90] sardonic asides, interjections and exclamations. Further, paragraphs are generally short; vocabulary and syntax are simple; there are occasional examples of vernacular diction;[91] and dialogue is rendered in the Egyptian colloquial. There is also a self-consciously "spontaneous" style to the narration, which peaks and dips in line with Sāmī's often volatile moods, and is one moment idealistic, then another ebullient, confiding, self-doubting, indignant, and so on. In sum, all of these features combine to create an informal, "authentic", and at times disarmingly honest narrative.

One of the main structural devices in this story is coincidence, which reinforces its "moral", but detracts to some degree from its verisimilitude. Coincidence is evident in the text's numerous parallel relationships: both women (Sāmīa and Fā'iza) want to marry a man "above" them, while both men (Sāmī and Nabīl) want to marry a woman "beneath" them; both Sāmī's and Nabīl's parents disapprove of their sons' "inferior" choice of marriage partner, while both Sāmīa's and Fā'iza's families want their daughters to marry husbands of "superior" standing, and so on. Again, these strictly vertical relationships reflect the continued existence and rigidity of Egypt's class system, and reveal the limited extent of fluidity between its social groups. As such, they serve to expose the myth of the new regime's so-called "classless" society, and to undermine the ideal of a unified national community.

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[90] *Al-wāqi' anna*, p. 71 ff.

[91] As when Sāmī notes that Nabīl, whom his parents used to warn him against, has now become *farkha bi kishk* (lit. "the bees knees", or "the best thing since sliced bread") to them. See "al-Nās Maqāmāt", p. 81.

Perhaps the most significant site of narrative activity is the insurance company, which is itself structured along class lines, with Fā'iza and her father at the bottom of the pyramid, Sāmī and his father in the middle, and Nabīl and his father at the top. The company also represents certain social realities: the recurring motif of life insurance speaks both of the anxieties and insecurities of the Egyptian bourgeoisie, and of their commitment to investing in their future and that of their children. (Sāmī remarks that, of all the classes, it is the middle class which is most likely to take out such insurance).[92] The company also expresses the paradoxical characteristics of a nation undergoing socio-political transformation: on the one hand, it alludes to the new regime's vision of entrepreneurship unfettered by class constraints, while on the other, it conforms to the traditional model of paternalism and patronage (embodied in the person of Nabīl's father), supporting the maxim that "it's not what you know, but who you know". As such, the discourse articulates the view that, no matter how hard one works, and irrespective of the rewards one receives for one's labours, in order to have real social status, one must still be *born* into wealth and influence. *Arrivistes*, meanwhile, should be content to remain in "their place" — evidence perhaps of the continued existence of pre-revolutionary political and ideological structures.

4. "Nashrat al-Akhbār" ("The News Bulletin", 1957)

Following the above three forays into middle-class life, "Nashrat al-Akhbār" witnesses a return to the *topos* of the working-class alley, with al-Shārūnī setting the narrative action amid the rumpus and squalor of yet another of his traditional, urban microcosms.[93] The text is a tissue of themes, all oppositional in nature, ranging from the simple ontological life/death binarism, through to the conflict between tradition, its values and belief systems, and the spirit of technological or scientific enquiry. Other subordinate themes include poverty and underdevelopment versus the global quest for

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[92] Ibid., p. 82.

[93] See also the stories: "Maṣra' Abbās al-Ḥilū"; "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt"; "al-Mu'dam al-Thāmin" ("The Eighth Condemned Man"), first published in *al-Adīb*, Beirut, May 1950, reprinted in *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, pp. 78-83; and "Qiddīs fi Ḥāratinā" ("A Saint in Our Alley"), first published in *al-Adīb*,

capital; "Eastern" spiritualism versus "Western" science and materialism; good versus evil; and sanity versus madness.

The story's dramatic events are reported by its narrator: at 8:35 in a poor quarter of Cairo,[94] a block of flats collapses and around two hundred and fifty people are killed. On the top floor and roof of the building, a wedding party had been under way, while below the "Association of Divine Mysteries"[95] — a Sufi group — had been holding a commemorative service for one of its members. Among the survivors is Umm Khalīl, the local busy-body, who had spotted dust falling earlier that evening, and who had tried in vain to warn the wedding party of the danger. The revellers had ejected her, branding her a "loud-mouthed gossip",[96] and so she had headed off to tell Umm Sayyid, the local shopkeeper, at which point the house had collapsed.

As the bodies of her husband and son are drawn from the rubble, Umm Khalīl is reminded of a dream she had had the night before, in which a stranger dressed in white had come and taken her husband and child away, and in which the stairway and half of the building had seemed to vanish inexplicably.[97] As a counterpoint to this sequence of events, and above the din of the party and the proclamations of the Qur'ān reciter, a radio in Umm Sayyid's shop is broadcasting the 8:30 news at full volume, "as though she and all the residents of the alley were practically deaf".[98] The bulletin, which is dominated by the story of the launching of the first space satellite, is finally silenced after one last, extraordinary item, claiming: "Twenty people in New Guinea died today, having been struck by a laughing disease. To now, the number of those

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Beirut, September 1952, reprinted in *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*, pp. 24-30.

94 Ḥārat al-Mugharbilīn, also mentioned in "al-Qayẓ".

95 "Nashrat al-Akhbār", p. 128.

96 Ibid., p. 130.

97 We find a similar scenario in "Qiddīs fi Ḥāratinā". Set in a similar working-class alley, the text reveals how a childless woman, Umm Nādī, receives instructions in a dream from a white-robed figure, who tells her that she must feed and clothe the local down-and-out, 'Amm Ismā'īl. In return, she will be rewarded with a child.

98 "Nashrat al-Akhbār", p. 129.

afflicted and hospitalised has reached seventy, the patients laughing night and day before dying."[99]

Instantly remarkable is the way "Nashrat al-Akhbār" juxtaposes the tragic alongside the comic, often to perverse or even preposterous effect. Yet this is also a strongly polemical text, which condemns contemporary society for its loss of values and meaning, and highlights the absurdities and inequities of modern life. It is also a deceptively complex narrative, revealing a self-conscious attention to form that sets it apart from the other stories in this chapter. As such, it marks a shift away from al-Shārūnī's brief flirtation with realistic narrative, and shows a return to the modernist sensibility, which he had first begun to explore more than ten years earlier.

The Self and the Other as Civilisational Contestants

As we found in "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl", "Nashrat al-Akhbār" contains numerous characters, none of which might be identified as a *primary* narrative self. Rather, all of these characters combine to form a collective narrative self, which may be taken to represent the Egyptian masses, or nation. Equally, we find a collective, rather than an individual, narrative other, consisting in two distinct, competing cultures: the capitalist West (notably the United States and its allies, Britain), and the communist Soviet Union.[100] Together, these competing cultures form a civilisational other, or what we might define as a hegemonic other-in-process, fighting to gain ascendancy over independent Egypt, be it by economic, political or cultural means.[101] As such, the relationship between the self and the other reflects the power relations of a civilisational contest.

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[99] Ibid., p. 137.

[100] Allusions to the conflict between the West and Soviet Union can be found in the many textual references to the space race.

[101] It should be noted that Egypt struck up an alliance with the Soviet Union after the United States and Britain withdrew funding for the Aswan Dam. Further, with British power now considerably weakened in the Middle East, the United States and Soviet Union were in competition to become the leading power in the region.

Egypt, the narrative self, appears to be isolated and vulnerable, located as it is in the (by-now classic) motif of the self-contained alley, peopled by impoverished, under-educated, rather inward-looking citizens. Its signifying practices are based on praxis and tradition, affirming the philosophies of religion and local belief systems, and are expressed predominantly in the rhetoric and rituals of Islam. Examples include the Qur'ānic reciter reading verses from the Holy Book; the *ma'dhūn* reciting the Sayings of the Prophet; description of the rituals of the signing of the marriage contract; Umm Khalīl swearing by Allah; the cries of the dying: "*Yā sātir, yā rabb*!" ("O Protector, O Lord!"); reference to the Prophet Noah — *may peace be upon him*; reference to ritual purity, prayer, and so on. Yet, in many ways, religious practice seems to be reduced here to stock phrases, routine, imitation and, above all, superstition, reinforcing the connection al-Shārūnī makes between religious conservatism, blind tradition and civilisational underdevelopment. Once more, this attitude may be indicative of the growing appeal of secularism at this time, or of the new regime's preoccupation with the nation's scientific and technological development.

The other is portrayed as being remote, strange, and, in many respects, somewhat absurd. Unlike the self, it is technologically developed, and is a dominant, rather than a subordinate, force. Its values and signifying practices are presented via the discourse of the news bulletin, and are distinguished by the philosophies of materialism, individualism, and neo-colonialism/-imperialism. Three items in the bulletin are relevant in these respects: that "one of the advertising agencies in Detroit announced that it had begun to study ways of advertising in space";[102] that "in America toy experts had succeeded in inventing a satellite for children";[103] and that "a young American had protested to the Soviet government about its violation of his legal rights in his own air space. The young man had gone so far as to register his own state, Celestia, with an agency in Chicago."[104]

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[102] "Nashrat al-Akhbār", p. 133.
[103] Ibid., p. 135.
[104] Ibid., pp. 131-132.

Most of the stories featuring in the news bulletin pertain to the other, rather than to the self, and range from the trivial to the outright ridiculous.[105] Embedded within these is one local news item, a reminder about the imminent onset of the Nile floods, and the fact that forty-two thousand homes in Cairo alone are at risk of collapse. The subordination of this local story to other, more remote and inconsequential items, reveals the way in which the bulletin asserts the *discursive* power of the other, or its attempts to attain discursive hegemony over the self.[106] On occasions, the self appears to attempt to deflect these discursive encroachments, as we find when one of the Shaykhs of al-Azhar announces that "the launching of the satellite should not be considered a challenge to the power of the Creator",[107] as a counter to the Archbishop of Canterbury's declaration that "nothing is impossible in a world that has created a satellite".[108]

Ordering a Subersive, Chaotic Narrative World

The most salient structural features of this text are layering, binarisms and juxtapositions, which al-Shārūnī employs extensively. First, they impose some sort of order on what is a fundamentally subversive and chaotic text; second, they lend an appropriately "universal" dimension to the narrative;[109] and third, they demonstrate the inescapable interconnectedness of relations between the self and the other. Elements of all of these organising categories are evident in al-Shārūnī's fictional building: the block is divided into two floors, each of which contains two flats, thereby producing two distinct spheres, or poles, of narrative action, with the wedding party in the upper sphere and the Qur'ānic recitation in the lower. What is more, each floor of the building contains parallel, juxtaposed elements: upstairs is the *ma'dhūn* drawing up the official marriage contract, while downstairs is the Qur'ān reciter commemorating his

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[105] In one such story, "the astrologer Chilo Antonio had assured people that the satellite would have no celestial effect on their destinies", while in another "a Mrs. Spesliakion had claimed that she had been able, in her sleep, to hear signals sent out by the satellite through her hairpins". Ibid., p. 136.
[106] As such, the news bulletin is a metaphor for the other's authority, and powers of expansion.
[107] "Nashrat al-Akhbār", p. 136.
[108] Ibid., p. 137.
[109] Cf. also "Maṣra' Abbās al-Ḥilū" and "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt".

dead colleague. Both men of religion are flanked on either side by male neighbours, the *ma'dhūn* by Umm Khalīl's henpecked husband, and the reciter by the young man Shalabī Shalabāya, whose pregnant wife has recently left him. The following figure illustrates the structure of the building:

Roof:
Wedding party (belly-dancer and revellers)

First floor Shaykh (*ma'dhūn*)	Umm Khalīl's husband and son
Ground floor Shalabī Shalabāya	Qur'an reciter and Sufi group

In binaristic terms, these two main poles of action may be distinguished as "the world of the flesh" versus "the world of the spirit", or simply the world of the future versus the world of the past. What is interesting is the way in which the world of the flesh, with its raucous merry-making and the sensualism of the belly-dancer, is given spatial supremacy over the world of the spirit, as we may see from the following:

> Zawāyid was dancing before two hundred men, women and children, her costume covering half of her body and revealing the rest. Every bit of her flesh shook — as did the costume — as though each bit of her was unattached to the other. The onlookers shook ... and the roof shook ... with the impact of her body, the impact of her feet, and the impact of the steady, rhythmical clapping, which the loudspeaker transmitted, proclaiming the approval of the participating audience. Meanwhile, the Qur'ān reciter of the Association of Divine Mysteries was reciting the following verse: "And there is nothing hidden in the heaven or the earth but it is in a clear record."[110]

By subordinating the world of the spirit in such a way, the author again appears to be questioning the significance of religion, and its relevance in an increasingly secular, materialistic society. We might also argue that the collapse of the building is a metaphor for the collapse of religious belief itself.

Layering is also apparent in the narrative's tripartite time scheme, in which the action of the text is either explicitly or implicitly played out. This time scheme consists

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[110] "Nashrat al-Akhbār", p. 130. Note the irony implicit in the Qur'ānic verse, since all of this is

in the following: an internal order, being the sum of the narrative action *in the alley itself*, which takes place within the ten-minute framework of the news bulletin; an external order, encompassing those events happening *in other parts of the world* (as reported in the news bulletin); and a universal order, being a site of implicit activity, suggesting the infinity of space and the domain of the Divine. The universal order is especially significant, since it underscores the philosophical distinctions between the self and the other: "space" is represented in both abstract and absolute terms (in an absolute sense, it is the physical location of cosmonauts and satellites, while in an abstract sense, it is the heavens, or the site of God's existence). A final example of layering may be seen in the "competing noises"[111] of the alley — being the proclamations of the news bulletin, the music and merry-making of the wedding party, and the Qur'ānic recitation. These break down into a competing hierarchy of discourses, all of which — it should be noted — are eclipsed by the fall of the building.

Besides layering, binarisms and juxtapositions, "Nashrat al-Akhbār" contains many other examples of narrative experimentation. One such example is the montage technique, by which al-Shārūnī disrupts the chronological ordering of textual events by slicing in fragments from the news bulletin, drawn from disparate locations, sources and cultures. This constantly decentres the focus of the reader, and gives the impression of short, cinematic shots, which relay the reader from scene to scene, with all the speed of a satellite signal or radio wave. The purpose of employing this device is twofold: first, it supports the motifs of technology and mass communications, second, it generates a narrative effect which mimics the contradictions, dislocations and, on occasions, absurdity of modern life. Another device which serves to enhance this effect is the lack of closure at the end of the narrative, which, as we have seen, ends with the peculiar announcement about a "laughing disease" in New Guinea. It is in this bizarre and darkly comic image that we find possibly the most serious comment

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absent from the news bulletin.

in the text, since this is a metaphor for the narrative self, and is a caution against self-satisfaction and complacence. The self, it would seem, is taking life too lightly, ignoring warnings of danger and living only for the present.[112]

Behind the familiar persona of the omniscient narrator, the narrative's caustic ideological discourse tells us much about al-Shārūnī's perceptions of his society. Primarily, he expresses visible distaste at what we might call the universalising discourse of materialism and greed, which motivates all his characters, from the building's unscrupulous landlord, to those who profit from the tragedy, such as Umm Sayyid (whose takings soar from sales to morbid onlookers), and even the hired women mourners who come to sniff around the death scene. To al-Shārūnī, the lives of Egypt's impoverished citizens are cheap — and insignificant in the greater scheme of things — for it is only with the event of such a huge and hideous tragedy that the alley enters the consciousness of those who live in the world outside it. As the narrator explains:

> In a matter of minutes — at 8:36 exactly — our alley had acquired great importance. At least two hundred well-wishers landed on top of fifty at the commemorative service. (... Perhaps the bodies of the dancer and the Qur'ān reciter landed alongside one another?) This in itself was a big story for the morning papers, and brought undreamt-of fame to our alley as a consequence. It was also a golden opportunity for the advertising sections of insurance companies ... [113]

In opposition to "Anīsa" and "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl", "Nashrat al-Akhbār" exposes the harsh realities of Egypt's post-revolutionary situation. For, despite reforms and the drive towards industrialisation, poverty and ignorance still prevail, and the country continues to suffer from under-investment in its infrastructure. Superficially, "Nashrat al-Akhbār" appears to read like a naturalistic text, with the alley's impoverished residents at the mercy of their environment, yet this is not the case. For, with al-

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[111] Ibid., p. 128.
[112] In this way, the collapsed apartment block takes on the associations of that other great ruin of pride, the Tower of Babel.
[113] "Nashrat al-Akhbār", p. 133.

Shārūnī, human agency is always paramount, and his characters are always (theoretically) capable of determining their own futures. Lastly, while "Nashrat al-Akhbār" presents us with a squalid and meaningless tragedy, it also reminds us that such a tragedy could — and should — have been avoided.

Conclusion

From the stories we have analysed here, we may see how this chapter breaks down into two distinct sections. The first of these, consisting in the stories "Anīsa" and "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl", embodies nationalist ideology, and betrays a national self-consciousness shaped by the rhetoric of the revolutionary regime. The stories in this section express excitement and optimism, and dwell on themes such as national unity and reconciliation; class transformation; socialisation and co-operation for the common good; the dominance of the collectivity; and belonging and security. The most prominent motifs are those of the family and the home. There is also a strong moral ethos, perhaps hinting towards a backlash against earlier, more radical, sentiments.

In this section, we find a symbiotic relationship between the self and the other, and an emphasis on altruism. Construction of identity is overwhelmingly external, and is directed almost exclusively towards the needs of the group, or collectivity. Individual selves continue to manifest interiority, but the interest in the texts lies in the ways in which they negotiate between that interiority and group pressures. Above all, the collective consciousness dominates, and is represented as a monolithic, sometimes dogmatic and rather rigid, entity. The emergence of a specifically "Coptic" discourse implies a new confidence inspired by the regime's egalitarian message, yet it is not an exclusivist discourse. Rather, it celebrates Egypt's social and cultural diversity, while stressing a common "Egyptianness" among characters. Self-other perceptions may be summarised as follows:

SELF	OTHER
Confident	Confident
At peace	At peace
Active participant in society; "at home"	Active participant in society; "at home"
Content with status quo	Content with status quo
Accepts present; hopes for future	Accepts present; hopes for future
Collective sense of identity	Collective sense of identity
Narrative world of harmony and reason	Narrative world of harmony and reason

By the second section, which consists in the stories "al-Nās Maqāmāt" and "Nashrat al-Akhbār", we note a sense of anti-climax and disillusionment with the regime and its ideology, evidenced by the re-introduction of themes such as the desire for justice and equity. Most significantly, national unity is exposed as a myth, torn asunder by petty power struggles and rivalries, both internal and external. As a result of the government's preoccupation with industrialisation and technological development, science is seen to have triumphed over religion. Prominent motifs from this section include the disintegrating family and interfamilial conflict, technology and materialism, cruelty and the breakdown of romantic love.

By this stage in the development of the dynamic narrative self, the individual is under threat from numerous quarters, and is becoming crushed under the might of an overbearing other. As a result, it must learn to defend itself, though it is rapidly losing its new-found confidence. Above all, there are marked inequalities between the self and the other, prompting the self to try to claw back some dignity and respect, though not always with success. Self-other perceptions are reduced in the following paradigm:

SELF	OTHER
Controlled	Controlling
Uncertain, questioning	Certain, unquestioning
On defensive	On offensive
Dissatisfied with status quo	Satisfied with status quo
Uneasy with present; concerned for future	Content with present, preoccupied with future
Tension between individual and collective identities	Collective identity dominates
Narrative world of confusion, inequality, oppression	Narrative world of certainty, opportunity, domination

Chapter Four

The Self and the Other in the Post-Nationalist Phase

By the early 1960s, Egypt had attained economic and military predominance in the Arab world, and popular enthusiasm for nationalism was at its highest level ever. Yet, the optimism marking the early years of independence soon gave way to a mood of growing cynicism, as those who had once supported the revolution began to question whether it had truly fulfilled its original aims. This mood intensified throughout the decade, as Egypt shifted towards its post-nationalist phase, and back towards authoritarianism and autocracy. Among the major political events of the decade were the breakup of the UAR and the *naksa* ("setback"), Egypt's defeat in the 1967 war against Israel. Both exposed the weaknesses of Nasser's pan-Arab dream and, in Egypt at least, led to a shift away from pan-Arab and even national loyalties, and back towards personal or group interests. Ironically, this provided the regime with the opportunity to neutralise all forms of perceived opposition, thereby returning Egypt to the state of totalitarianism it had been under before the revolution.

This chapter spans the period from January 1960, the publication date of al-Shārūnī's short story "Ḥāris al-Marmā" ("The Goalkeeper"),[1] to July 1969, when he published "Lamaḥāt min Ḥayāt Mawjūd 'Abd al-Mawjūd" ("Glimpses from the Life of Mawjūd 'Abd al-Mawjūd").[2] The four short stories which will be analysed are: "al-

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[1] First published in the daily *al-Jumhuriyya*, Cairo, 20 January 1960. Reprinted in *Risāla ilā Imra'a*, pp. 33-45.

[2] First published in *al-Majalla*, Cairo, July 1969. Reprinted in *al-Ziḥām*, pp. 25-42. A significantly modified version of the story also appeared in *Gālīrī 68*, Cairo, February 1971, pp. 48-57, and yet another version appeared in the critical anthology *al-Khawf wa'l-Shajā'a: Dirāsāt fī Qiṣaṣ Yūsuf al-Shārūnī* [*Fear and Courage: Studies in the Stories of Yūsuf al-Shārūnī*], Kitābāt Mu'āṣira (Cairo: Kitābāt Mu'āṣira, 1971), pp. 8-25.

Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn" ("Flesh and Knife");[3] "al-Ziḥām" ("The Crowd");[4] "Naẓariyya fi'l-Jilda al-Fāsida" ("The Broken Washer Theory");[5] and "Lamaḥāt min Ḥayāt Mawjūd 'Abd al-Mawjūd".

Autocracy and the End of the Pan-Arab Dream

Dominated by the person and ambitions of Nasser, the revolutionary regime soon established the ascendancy of the state over civil society. It placed absolute supremacy in the executive, headed by an all-powerful president, a state-form which one scholar describes as "Egyptian Bonapartism".[6] It was an authoritarian system in nature, with a select few individuals at the apex of the regime, holding enormous amounts of highly-centralised power. Those groups which fell beyond the regime's control were either restructured, assimilated or destroyed, while those who could be controlled were re-organised via parallel associations, such as those set up for students, women, doctors, lawyers and the peasantry.[7] Thus, by the beginning of the 1960s, power in Egypt had become almost absolute, with no legal opposition, and no democracy.

By as early as 1961, Syria broke away from the UAR due to practical, political and economic differences with Egypt. In effect, Nasser's pan-Arab dream was over almost as soon as it had begun, although factors such as the 1962 Algerian war of independence and the plight of the Palestinians continued to foster feelings of Arab unity.[8] Yet Nasser continued to cling to his commitment to Arabism, and remained

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[3] First published in the daily *Akhbār al-Yawm*, Cairo, 2 December 1961. Reprinted in *al-Ziḥām*, pp. 67-82. The story also appears in *al-Majmū'āt,* vol. 2, under the title "al-Ẓufur wa'l-Laḥm" ("Flesh and Nail"), pp. 81-99.

[4] First published in the daily *al-Ahrām*, Cairo, 15 February 1963. Reprinted in *al-Ziḥām*, pp. 5-23.

[5] First published in the monthly *al-Majalla*, Cairo, February 1968. Reprinted in *al-Ziḥām*, pp. 43-65. The story also appears in *al-Majmū'āt*, vol. 2, pp. 55-80, with the slightly modified title: "Naẓariyyat al-Jilda al-Fāsida" ("The Broken Washer Theory").

[6] Shukrallah, op. cit., p. 61.

[7] For a discussion of the power and pervasiveness of the state apparatus in Egypt after the revolution, see Roger Owen's "The Growth of State Power in the Arab World: The Single-Party Regimes", in his *State Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, op. cit., pp. 33-54.

[8] In fact, Hopwood claims: "By 1964, the Arab world was more divided than ever, despite the underlying desire for unity", op. cit., p. 67.

convinced that revolution should continue to be exported to all Arab states. He was unwilling to adjust or accept any criticism of his stance, and his rhetoric was often at odds with popular sentiment and the national reality. For example, projects which aimed to boost Egypt's prestige in the region, such as intervention in the war in North Yemen, met with little popular support. Most damaging, however, was the 1967 defeat, which spelt the end for Nasser's vision and, in many ways, his system of government.

The third Arab-Israeli war had disastrous consequences, and led to the loss of Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Golan Heights and Sinai. It exposed the Egyptian army's technological and structural weaknesses, and meant crippling financial losses due to the loss of equipment and aid, and the closure of the Suez canal. Worst of all was the realisation that, "throughout the initial days of the conflict, the leaders of the Arab world [had] lied to their peoples. All the pretensions of previous decades were swept away, and what ensued was a moral crisis on the broadest scale."[9] With his leadership badly weakened and Egypt's regional status diminished, Nasser offered to resign, but Egypt's citizens responded by demanding that he remain in power. As Hopwood notes: "It was a dangerous identification of Egypt's future with one man. Nasser had led the country to defeat. Egypt without Nasser was unthinkable."[10] A phase of recriminations and scapegoating ensued, consisting in purges within the army and petty reprisals against Egypt's Jewish community.

As a whole, the 1960s in Egypt were marked by political purges of all descriptions. Unprepared to tolerate less than unconditional acceptance of his rule, Nasser became increasingly authoritarian as public dissent began to rise to the surface. A resurgence in the activities of the *Ikhwān* in 1965 led to the execution in 1966 of their senior ideologue, Sayyid Quṭb (1906-66). Meanwhile, students, journalists and opposition

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[9] Allen, op. cit., p. 49.
[10] Hopwood, op. cit., p. 78.

groups of all political hues — communists in particular — were silenced by various forms of coercion and intimidation. These campaigns were often carried out by the police force and intelligence services (*mabāḥith amn al-dawla*), the latter of whom gained an especially fearsome reputation. Fear of persecution stopped the public from protesting too vociferously against these measures, with the effect that most expressions of popular dissent remained muted until after the 1967 defeat. As Hafez observes:

> During this decade, there was no public activity not subject to official control, everywhere one encountered not living but official beings concealing their individual personalities beneath a carapace of conformity, people who acted out social roles and repeated, automatically, slogans that were often contrary to their real hidden opinions.[11]

The 1960s also witnessed the continued expansion of the state apparatus, leading to the problem of an over-extensive and inefficient bureaucracy. Other factors added to this, the first being the shortfall which arose between the skills of existing bureaucrats and the demands of the rapidly-growing public sector. As Galal Amin claims, the culture of the previous administration meant that "bureaucrats were extremely reluctant to delegate authority",[12] while inefficiency worsened under the strain of expanded workloads and unfamiliar responsibilities. A second factor was the new government policy guaranteeing all graduates positions in the administration or public sector, which demanded massive training programmes and led inevitably to over-recruitment. Third was the burden — in terms of time and effort — created by setting up innumerable new ministries and authorities, such as supervisory bodies for government or business affairs. Inevitably, all of these factors promoted slackness, apathy, inefficiency and corruption. Resentment was also generated by the fact that, while the majority of petty bureaucrats were powerless, the more senior officials were often extremely influential, enjoying an enviable range of economic and social privileges.

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[11] Sabry Hafez, "The Egyptian Novel in the Sixties", in Issa J. Boullata (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Modern Arabic Literature* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1980), p. 78.

In terms of national identity, the 1960s in Egypt witnessed radical changes. Even by the first few years of the decade, the unifying vision that had underpinned the drive towards independence had all but fragmented, to the effect that Egyptian society had begun to re-divide itself into groups representing different ideological, economic and communal interests. Hafez also notes the emergence of a more individualistic consciousness at this time, adding that "wider access to education [...] also fostered socio-cultural awareness, so that each class, social group or political group became conscious of its identity and its difference from others".[13] This period also witnessed a shift from what Hourani terms "territorial patriotism" to "religious" nationalism,[14] which views the members of a religious community as forming a political community. The most vocal exponents of religious nationalism at this time were the Zionists in Israel and the diaspora, and those Muslims in the region who backed a pan-Islamic (rather than a pan-Arab) ideology.

The stirrings of political consciousness were not limited to the Jewish and Muslim communities, however, for in Egypt this phenomenon extended also to the Copts. Most Copts had welcomed the new regime, but had begun with time to question the moral authority of Nasser's government, since it appeared neither to express the will of the Coptic minority, nor to serve its interests in the wider community. The Copts were also affected badly by the nationalisation process,[15] while their grievances were strengthened further by the introduction of policies such as the enforcement of religion in the school curricula, and the reform of al-Azhar university which, naturally,

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[12] Galal Amin, "The Egyptian Economy and the Revolution", in P. J. Vatikiotis (ed.), *Egypt Since the Revolution* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), p. 47.

[13] Sabry Hafez, "The Transformation of Reality and the Arabic Novel's Aesthetic Response", *BSOAS*, vol. LVII:1, 1994, pp. 94-95.

[14] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, 2nd. ed. (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1983), pp. 341-342.

[15] The Minority Rights Group International writes that "the nationalization process [...] affected Copts more than Muslims, because it abolished many of the skilled jobs which Copts excelled in. In general, Copts lost 75 per cent of their work and property." Saad Eddin Ibrahim et al., *The Copts of Egypt*, Minority Rights Group International Report 95/6 (Cairo: Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies, 1996), p. 16.

excluded Coptic students. Many Copts viewed these policies as evidence of a growing bond between the state and religion, which the leftists also saw as a betrayal of the regime's "socialist" ideal. Regarding Nasser's treatment of the Copts, Hopwood argues that he "tended to regard the Coptic community with indifference; he was an Arab nationalist appealing chiefly to Muslims in Egypt and elsewhere",[16] although Copts claim that "he did not trust them and that there was discrimination and no true equality".[17] While both views remain difficult to substantiate, what is certain is that the Copts suffered from disproportionate representation in national life,[18] and were becoming increasingly unnerved by the growing appeal of political Islam.

The 1960s also witnessed the increasing interpenetration of culture and politics, with Egypt's intellectuals, particularly of the older generation, being brought into the establishment as salaried civil servants. The state came to dominate almost all artistic and intellectual activities, even calling on its intelligentsia to "devise a culture for a peculiar mass society it called Arab socialist".[19] The debates and controversies of the intellectual community were closely monitored, and expression became subject to the severest restrictions, all of which had a tangible impact on cultural production. First, it hastened the death of socialist realism, since Hafez notes that "by 1960 most of its writers were imprisoned [...] and when they were released, a few years later, everything was changing".[20] Second, it led to many writers seeking refuge in symbolism, as a means of evading the controls of the censor, and third, it reduced a number of writers to state-sponsored panegyrists.

The *naksa* also had a marked effect on the artistic and intellectual output of the period. Since Egypt had long been considered a leading political and cultural centre in

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[16] Hopwood, op. cit., p. 164.
[17] Ibid., p. 165.
[18] "There were thirteen Coptic members in the 1960 National Assembly of 400, and it was reckoned that only three positions in the top 150 government posts were held by Copts." Ibrahim et al., op. cit., p. 164.
[19] Vatikiotis, *The History of Modern Egypt*, p. 497.

the Arab world, after the *naksa* its writers began to speak of their sense of bewilderment, self-doubt and wounded sense of national identity. Out of shock or denial, many intellectuals "stopped writing altogether, while others sought solace and reaffirmation through an investigation of the classical heritage (*turāth*) of the Arabs and of the bases of cultural authenticity (*aṣālah*)".[21] Others still, inspired by a series of anti-government riots and demonstrations in February and November 1968, began to express their anger at the political order, and voiced demands for anti-corruption measures and a free parliament. The issue of participation was particularly emotive, reflecting the widely-held view that, although individuals and the state had become inextricably bound, the individual played no significant role in national life.

Perhaps the most important artistic development of this period is that it witnessed the affirmation of the modernist sensibility. As Kharrat explains: "With the crude shattering of the established national and social reality, it was only to be expected that modernist literary trends would supplant the older, almost anachronistic mode of realism."[22] Through magazines such as *Gālīrī 68*, which Kharrat describes as "the first genuine platform of the modern sensibility in Egypt",[23] writers began to question established forms, to deconstruct the classical plot, to shift away from the exterior to the interior, and to consider new approaches to language, logic, and narrative time and space. In short, the modernist trend presented writers with new ways of perceiving art and reality, and offered new, unlimited possibilities for their expression. Among the main strands to emerge were symbolism and the absurd, both of which flourished since many writers could not declare their ideas for political reasons.

Within the domain of the Egyptian short story, Hafez notes that by the time the 1960s arrived, it had run into yet another crisis. Prominent former exponents of the

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[20] Hafez, "The Modern Arabic Short Story", p. 302.
[21] Allen, op. cit., p. 79.
[22] Kharrat, op. cit., p. 187.
[23] Ibid., p. 186.

genre, including Idrīs and al-Sharqāwī, had turned their attentions to the novel and drama, while al-Shārūnī had opted to concentrate on criticism.[24] Indeed, it was to be nine years before al-Shārūnī brought out his third collection, *al-Ziḥām (The Crowd)*. Containing nine stories, a collection of "Minute-Stories",[25] and one piece which al-Shārūnī claims "may not be a story, but is certainly not an article",[26] only five of these nine stories were written after the publication of *Risāla ilā Imra'a*, two even being written before the publication of *al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa*.[27] Published in Beirut, it was not the threat of political censorship which prompted al-Shārūnī to publish *al-Ziḥām* outside of Egypt; rather, he claims that his motivations were purely practical, and that he simply could not find a backer for the collection at home.[28]

It was with the eventual emergence of a newer generation of writers, who embraced modernism with enthusiasm and began to experiment extensively with its forms, that this second crisis of the short story was resolved. As this "sixties generation" began to gain in confidence and take the genre in new directions, established writers such as Idrīs and al-Shārūnī began to redirect their energies towards short-story writing. In many ways, this was due to the new possibilities for the genre generated by the revitalised modernist trend, but as Hafez also observes: "Perhaps the nature of the

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[24] Hafez, "Innovation in the Egyptian Short Story", p. 108.

[25] Being eleven short sketches or amusing incidents, some only two or three paragraphs in length, grouped under the title "Qiṣaṣ fī Daqā'iq". These were first published individually, between January 1956 and November 1957, in the weekly *Ṣabāḥ al-Khayr* and the monthlies *al-Shahr* and *al-Risāla al-Jadīda*. They were later reprinted in *al-Ziḥām*, pp. 125-138.

[26] "Yawm fi'l-Kharīf" ("A Day in Autumn"), first published in *al-Adīb*, Beirut, January 1949, reprinted in *al-Ziḥām*, pp. 139-151. In al-Shārūnī's introduction to *al-Ziḥām*, he states that this text "had stayed secluded among my papers for almost twenty years, waiting in vain to be included in a book". He adds: "Finally, it has conceded — as though out of shame — to be placed at the end of this collection, thereby declaring that the story form is more receptive to it than any other literary genre." *Al-Ziḥām*, p. 139.

[27] "Al-'Awda min al-Manfā", op. cit., and "Yawm fi'l-Kharīf", op. cit. Al-Shārūnī claims that he did not include certain stories, such as "al-Ḥidhā'", in earlier collections, "because they were not of a good artistic standard" and needed to be rewritten. Personal interview, 12 September 1998.

[28] Marina Stagh suggests that this was a phenomenon particular to modernist writers. As she states: "It was not the most oppressed writers in Egypt, the politically committed Left, that turned to Beirut to get published in the fifties and sixties, but rather the independents and modernists, bent more on aesthetics and psychology than practical utopias." In *The Limits of Freedom of Speech: Prose*

historical moment and the new character which the 'sixties crystallized, made the short story the most suitable form for these years."[29] From the analyses of the four short stories that follow, we see how al-Shārūnī's earlier experiments with modernism had by now developed into a mature and highly evolved narrative style.

1. "Al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn" ("Flesh and Knife"), 1961

Like "Anīsa", "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn" is a text with an explicitly Christian identity, containing Christian characters and settings, allusions to Biblical stories and personalities, and symbols with specific, Christian significance. The text centres on a Coptic family and, much in the manner of "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl", gives us insight into Coptic customs, rituals and ceremonies, particularly weddings and funerals. The *fabula* centres on a conflict between two brothers: Mīlād, a vet in Cairo, and Shafīq, who manages the family's land in al-Minyā. Although the two men grow up to be close, sharing their adolescent exploits and even marrying their cousins in a joint wedding, following the death of their father they begin to clash, when Shafīq demands a larger share of their inheritance. The arguments continue, until one day Shafīq shoots Mīlād, albeit wounding him only slightly. The mother of the men, a sickly woman suffering from high blood pressure and diabetes, breaks down from stress and is rushed into hospital, where she later dies. Only then do her sons recognise the harm their feud has caused, and accept that they must reunite for the sake of their family's future.

Copts, Muslims and the Fragmented "I"

Oppositional in so many ways, Mīlād and Shafīq appear to conform to the classic self/other paradigm. Yet, in fact, the two brothers are the same narrative self, and, as is so frequently the case with al-Shārūnī's protagonists, they represent a sort of "split personality" — that is, they are the self and other of the same narrative "I". For this

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Literature and Prose Writers under Nasser and Sadat, Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, Stockholm Oriental Studies 14 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1993), p. 95.

reason, the text sets out to foreground their similarities, revealing how, in their early years, the differences between them were minimal:

> Mīlād and Shafīq were brothers and, until six years ago, had also been friends. They were close in age, Mīlād being two years older than Shafīq, and were close in appearance. The moment you saw one of them you knew he was the other's brother, and on first getting to know them you would get them muddled up, not knowing which was Mīlād and which Shafīq. [They had the] same brown face and slightly elongated nose, medium-sized body and coarse, thick black hair.[30]

Starting out as equals in the narrative, the men only appear to diverge once they start to argue over their inheritance:

> At that time their looks had begun to differ, perhaps due to their getting married and having grown older, perhaps due to the discord that had come to pass between them. Baldness had started to creep along the front of Mīlād's head, and he had become thinner, like his late father. He had started wearing glasses and seemed more sober in appearance. As for Shafīq, he had grown a thin moustache and tended to be plump, rather like his grandmother on his mother's side, so that he seemed shorter than his brother. He also began to smoke more, until his teeth and the space between the first and middle fingers of his right hand blackened. Even their natures differed; Mīlād seemed to be more cool and less excitable, while Shafīq seemed more emotional and imaginative, quick to flare up and quick to calm down.[31]

Although "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn is highly polysemous, and is laden with metaphor, allusion and allegory, we might read the narrative self as representing two dimensions of one whole, that is, as the Coptic and Muslim communities within the national collectivity. The fact that, as young men, the brothers are perceived to be similar and equal, is a reflection of the status of the Copts under the Wafd, at a time when they enjoyed considerable power at the national level. For it was only after the 1952 coup, and with the creation of the single-party system, that the Copts became sidelined from the political process, creating tensions between them and their Muslim compatriots. This may go some way towards explaining why tensions emerge between Mīlād and Shafīq, with each brother perceiving himself to be equally right and wronged.

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[29] Hafez, op. cit., p. 109.
[30] "Al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn", p. 69.

The text's reluctance to privilege any difference between the two brothers is indicative of al-Shārūnī's continued commitment to national unity, and to equality and fraternity over sectarian identity. The potentially dangerous consequences of sectarian partisanship are hinted at in the mother's admonition to her sons: "Ours was a model family and we've become a bad example."[32] Thus, while "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn" is clearly an articulation and affirmation of Christian identity, it is also a cautionary tale which argues against partisanship and for a common, Egyptian "humanity". It is also a mutedly optimistic narrative, as we see from the story's ending, with Shafīq's realisation of the damage he has done, and the gentle, closing scene of the brothers sitting to dinner. Although the narrative's events decelerate gently, they climax in their significance with the promise of resolution.

Sectarian Tensions in a "Christian" Narrative

The four main devices by which al-Shārūnī imbues this text with a particularly "Christian" character are: exclusivity of narrative location; allusion and analogy; symbols; and narrative ethos. First, narrative action is limited exclusively to Christian locations, such as in the following:

> Like weary footsteps, the church bells rang their sad, sporadic toll, and the vestibule became filled with dozens of men and women. A silence reigned over the men, while the women wept, garbed in black, relatives, neighbours and life-long friends among them. Meanwhile, the organ played its funereal dirge.
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> The weather was hot, and the condensation from people's breaths had intensified the heat of the atmosphere, so that sweat streamed down many a face and nostrils were filled with the smell of the human throng. Meanwhile, the (real and fake) stained-glass windows, and the pictures of angels and saints on the church's dome and walls, intensified the solemnity and sanctity of the place, as the shadow of death passed through it.[33]

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[31] Ibid., p. 72.
[32] Ibid., p. 73.
[33] Ibid., p. 67.

Besides the church, the most prominent "Christian" location of narrative action is the family's home in al-Duqqī, where there hangs a picture "of Christ crucified, announcing to all who enter the faith of those living in the house".[34]

Second, "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn" contains allusions and analogies to stories and themes from the Old and New Testaments. Besides enhancing the Christian character of the text, the associations arising from the original Biblical sources also widen its frame of reference. To readers for whom these sources are familiar, such allusions lend tragic irony to the text, for it is through them that one can anticipate how the conflict between the brothers will proceed. To turn first to the Old Testament, we may see that, on a general level, "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn" alludes to many of the main themes of the Book of Genesis, such as the conflict between the farmer and the shepherd; the fact that man must labour for his food; and the distinction between human and property rights. More specifically, the dispute between Mīlād and Shafīq alludes quite self-consciously to stories with parallel themes of sibling rivalry and inheritance disputes, such as the stories of Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, and Isaac and Ishmael. Examples of Biblical analogies may be seen in the table below, which illustrates some of the parallels between Cain and Abel and Mīlād and Shafīq:

	Cain and Abel	**Mīlād and Shafīq**
(a)	One brother a "keeper of sheep", the other a "tiller of the ground".[35]	One brother a vet, the other manager of the family's land.
(b)	Theme of the passing over of the first-born son: Abel's offering of a firstling of his flock to God is accepted, Cain's offering of firstfruits is not. The situation leads to tension between the brothers.	Theme of the passing over of the first-born son: Shafīq usurps Mīlad's right to a greater share of revenue from the land. The situation leads to tension between the brothers.
(c)	Cain and Abel were destined to marry their twin sisters.[36]	Mīlād and Shafīq are married to two sisters.
(d)	Cain asks God, "Am I my brother's	Brother (unidentified) asks mother, "Am I

[34] Ibid., p. 79.

[35] *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Genesis 4:2.

[36] This detail is not Biblical in origin, but appears in the Hebrew Midrash. It is said that "to ensure the propagation of the human race, a girl, destined to be his wife, was born together with the sons of Adam". See Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 1, trans. Henrietta Szold (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Sociey of America, 1947), p. 108.

	keeper?"[37]	my brother's keeper?"[38]
(e)	Cain pelts Abel's body with stones.[39]	Shafīq wounds Mīlād with a bullet.
(f)	Brother kills brother.	Brother shoots brother, but does not kill him.

Similar parallels with the story of Jacob and Esau include the fact that one brother (Esau) was a "man of the field"[40] while the other (Jacob) was a breeder of cattle. Once more we find the theme of the rights of the elder brother being usurped by the younger, as when Jacob persuaded Esau to sell him his birthright for a potage of lentils, and when Jacob deceived his dying father Isaac by pretending to be Esau. Lastly, there are also direct allusions to the story of Isaac and Ishmael, perhaps the most obvious being that Mīlād and Shafīq's father, the patriarch of the family, is called Abraham (Ibrāhīm). In one passage, we find an almost word-for-word rendition of the Biblical story of God's testing of Abraham, which is delivered in the form of an evoked memory:

> He [Shafīq] lifted his gaze and caught sight of his father's picture ... and he remembered the tens of times he had told the story of Abraham to him, and of how God had wanted to test him, so he ordered him to sacrifice his only son. So Abraham obeyed His command and went up to the mountain, where he bound his son and laid him on the altar upon the wood. Then he stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay him, and the angel of the Lord called unto him, saying: 'Lay not thine hand upon the lad.' So Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked and there was a ram behind him in the thicket, so he took it and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.[41]

According to *The Legends of the Jews*, Isaac and Ishmael also quarreled over the rights of the first-born, with Ishmael insisting that he should receive a double portion of the inheritance after Abraham's death.[42] In "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn", Shafīq demands a greater share of the inheritance than his brother, because the income from the land comes as a result of his own labour.

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[37] *The Holy Bible*, Genesis 4:10.

[38] "Al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn", p. 76.

[39] Ginzberg, op. cit., p. 109.

[40] *The Holy Bible*, Genesis 25:27. Though it would be more accurate to describe him as a hunter, rather than a farmer.

[41] "Al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn", p. 82.

From the New Testament, "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn" parallels events such as the death of Christ, and alludes to certain aspects of Christ's teachings and mission. Most prominent is the scene on the mother's death bed in the hospital, which refers directly to the Biblical narrative of Christ's crucifixion. Consider the following extracts from the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. John:

> Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? [...] And straightaway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave it him to drink. [...] Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent ...[43]

> Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it into his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, it is finished: and he bowed his head and gave up the ghost.[44]

Now compare these with the death scene from "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn":

> Sometimes she would open her mouth and it would seem as if she were panting with thirst, so they would moisten the tip of her tongue. [...] Then her condition worsened, and the day before yesterday her temperature rose ... It seemed she stayed suffering the death throes for three hours, from noon yesterday until three in the afternoon, when there was a slight earthquake lasting two seconds. The papers said the next day that the seat of the quake lay seven hundred and fifty miles to the north-east of Cairo.[45] At that moment, it seemed the deceased wanted to cry out, but she bowed her head forthwith and gave up the ghost.[46]

The Gospels also tell us that at Golgotha Jesus was offered a drink of wine mixed with a bitter substance,[47] while al-Shārūnī's text reads: "Thus Madam Umm Mīlād had to drink from the cup of vinegar and gall, as she saw her own flesh and blood rise up

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[42] Ginzberg, op. cit., p. 263.

[43] *The Holy Bible*, Matthew 17:45-52.

[44] Ibid., John 19:29-30

[45] Perhaps a reference to Golgotha.

[46] "Al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn", pp. 68-69.

[47] See *The Holy Bible,* Matthew 17:34; Mark 15:23.

one against the other."[48] Among the other parallels between the mother and Christ, we find that Umm Mīlād is humble and submissive, suffering passively at the wranglings of her feuding offspring. She also forewarns her death, as did Christ, when she says: "You and your brother are torturing me, torturing me and pushing me to the grave."[49] Umm Mīlād also dies for the sake of her sons and their sins, much as Christianity tells us Jesus did for mankind. Like Christ's, her death is necessary, so that she might stand as an example to the people she loves, who will follow on after her in deed and faith.

A third device to be considered here is symbols, with which the text is replete. Most significant are the many symbols of sacrifice: examples include the animals which Mīlād inspects for the *'īd al-aḍḥā* (feast of the sacrifice); the lamb, which the maid slaughters in honour of her dead mistress; the young bull, which Mīlād witnesses rebelling at the abattoir; and the ram, which Shafīq mentions in his rendition of the story of Abraham and Isaac. A less explicit symbol comes in the form of the mother, who, in her selflessness, dies for the love of her sons. While by no means exclusive to the Christian faith, the sacrifice is symbolically significant here on two counts: first, it is a metonymical representation of the person of Jesus Christ; second, it stands for the spiritual notion that personal sacrifice is necessary in order to attain humility before God. Evidence of Christ can be found in all of the symbols of sacrifice, most prominently that of young bull, whose final moments parallel those of the dying mother:

> It had opened its mouth, and its tongue hung out as it panted as though from terrible thirst, or as though it were at the end of a long and strenuous race. Then it let out a lowing that was nearer to a moan, and which shook the entire place ... until it went limp and breathed its last.[50]

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[48] "Al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn", p. 76.
[49] Ibid., pp. 76-77.
[50] Ibid., p. 81.

One final association with the sacrificial animal is found in allusions to the theme of "killing the fatted calf", which features in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son.[51] In this parable, a young man squanders his portion of his inheritance. Starving and humiliated, he decides to return to his father, admit that he has sinned, and ask that he be taken back as a hired servant. His father is overjoyed at his return, however, and announces: "Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry." The young man's elder brother is furious, but at his protests the father replies: "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." Besides reiterating the themes of sibling rivalry and of Christ, the son who "was dead and is alive again", this parable urges a number of points pertinent to this text: that the young should respect and not squander their inheritance; that material gains do not necessarily bring happiness; and that covetousness and judgementalism should be put aside, and the best of everything celebrated and welcomed.

One last, significant symbol is flesh, which represents half of the story's title. Besides its connections with sacrificial offerings, flesh also signifies three things: man's weakness and fallibility, stemming from the physical/sensual nature of the body as opposed to the soul or spirit; family, as in the expressions "to be one flesh" or "flesh and blood";[52] and social solidarity, as we find in the sacrificial Eucharistic meal, where flesh is a metonymical substitution for Christ. As a symbol of Fallen Man, Christian tradition also tells us that flesh is a symbol of moral corruption, which threatens the harmony and order of the world.

It is worth considering what might have motivated al-Shārūnī to write such an explicitly Christian text. On the metaphysical level, it would be reasonable to suggest

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[51] See *The Holy Bible*, Luke 15:11-32.

[52] The story takes its revised title, "al-Ẓufur wa'l-Laḥm", from the Egyptian expression *al-ẓufur mā yiṭla' min al-laḥm*, which means "the nail cannot come out of the flesh". Al-Shārūnī claims to have

that, as the son of a clergyman raised in a devout Christian environment, he may have contemplated the "universality" of Biblical discourse, and the extent to which it expresses fundamental "truths" or "ideals".[53] Similarly, as an artist, al-Shārūnī may have been drawn to both the aesthetic characteristics and dramatic potential of the Bible. Ideological motivations are also plausible; as we have seen, it was during this period that Egypt's Copts began to feel marginalised by the political, economic and social changes that followed the revolution, and that their role and status had diminished nationally. A combination of these factors, amongst others, meant that this period witnessed the first significant wave of Coptic migration from Egypt.

Various indications suggest that "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn" might be an ideologically-motivated narrative, the first being its reliance on the allegorical mode of expression. Allegory is particularly suitable to didactic narrative, which infers that this story has a message to communicate; allegory also has great potential for making elusive and often critical political comment. Biblical stories — including some of those alluded to in "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn" — have long been used as political allegories, early examples including when:

> [...] the Talmudic sages used the Cain and Abel story as a subterfuge that would enable them to comment with impunity on the murderousness of the Romans, or when Cain as well as Esau became code names for the cruel Roman rule, or when the argument between the brothers about the division of property was taken to allude to the Romans' attempts to appropriate Jewish land [...].[54]

In the same way, al-Shārūnī uses the story of Mīlād and Shafīq as an allegory by which to communicate the experiences of Egypt's Copts, particularly in view of their

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found this second title more appropriate to the theme of family unity. Personal interview, 12 September 1998.

[53] Interestingly, al-Shārūnī cites Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), a translation of which he read as an adolescent, as having had a marked influence on his literary career: "The notion of the journey, and the effort entailed in attaining the goal, have come constantly to me in all of my stories and studies. In the modern age this is a modest goal, relating to life's necessities, such as love, work and the home." Interview with Yāsīn Rifā'iyya, op. cit., p. 377.

loss of rights and land. Thus the dramatised conflict between the brothers may be decoded as a representation of the conflict between Egypt's Coptic and Muslim communities.[55] This interpretation is arrived at via the text's allusions to Jacob and Esau, whom, according to Biblical tradition, were described by God as two distinct "nations".[56] If we also consider the metaphorical function of the two brothers, we may see that Mīlād is a metaphor for the older, Coptic community (since he is the first-born of the two), while Shafīq, the younger, is a metaphor for the Muslims.[57] There also appears to be semantic intent in the brothers' names, for there are echoes of the notion of the first-born in the name "Mīlād", which means "birth", and is often associated with the nativity or birth of Christ.[58] The name Shafīq, while used by both Muslims and Christians, is also significant in that it is a synonym for "the compassionate", one of the names of Allah.

The commonly-recurring themes of the first-born and the birthright, particularly in respect of the matter of land, are another feature to support the argument for a Coptic-Muslim tension. According to Biblical tradition, the birthright (which was handed down from Abraham), promised not only an inheritance of worldly wealth but spiritual pre-eminence, thus its bearer was afforded a particular status. As we see in "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn", the distinction between the first-born son, who has the right of primogeniture, and the younger brother who usurps this right, is evident in both the *fabula* and its allusions to Biblical stories. Bearing in mind that the dispute between Mīlād and Shafīq centres on the issues of land and the loss of inheritance, it would be

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[54] David H. Hirsch and Nehama Aschkenasy (eds.), *Biblical Patterns in Modern Literature*, Brown Judaic Studies, No. 77 (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1984), p. 1.

[55] It should be stressed that, by their very nature, allegorical texts are open to a range of interpretations, and that the interpretation proposed here is merely one of many.

[56] "And the Lord said unto her [Rebekah], Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be the stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger." *The Holy Bible*, Genesis 25:23. *The Legends of the Jews* also reports that Rebekah sought advice on her difficult pregnancy from Shem, who said: "Two nations are in thy womb, and how should thy body contain them, seeing that the whole world will not be large enough for them to exist in it together peaceably?", p. 313.

[57] Historically speaking, this bears out the fact that Coptic Egypt came prior to the Muslim one.

reasonable to assume that this is the crux of the conflict between Copt and Muslim. As such, the text articulates the regrets of many Egyptian Copts at their losses resulting from reforms (particularly agrarian). As Frye notes:

> It is possible that the theme of the rejected rightful heir is linked to a nostalgia for aristocracy, not so much for itself as for representing some kind of glamour or splendour that has vanished from material life. The theme of the passed-over firstborn seems to have something to do with the insufficiency of the human desire for continuity which underlies the custom of passing the inheritance on to the eldest son.[59]

By emphasising the motifs of the first-born and the birthright, al-Shārūnī appears to make a number of points: first, he re-affirms the *honour* bestowed traditionally on the first-born (i.e. the Copts), and defends their authenticity as *Egyptian* citizens; second, he asserts the *rights* of the first-born, along with the status these rights traditionally confer. Therefore, Mīlād's protests that his rights have been "passed over" by his younger brother give voice to the "passed over" Coptic minority.

There is a final point to this text, which al-Shārūnī is at pains to stress. Biblical tradition also tells us that the first-born had to respect his birthright, and that he had to "earn" his privileges through the fulfilment of specific, often onerous, responsibilities — hence Esau was condemned for having "despised his birthright"[60] when he sold it so recklessly to Jacob. As such, al-Shārūnī's narrative reminds us that there are conditions attached to the rights of the first-born, and that the elder son's privileges do not come automatically:

> When they were children their father in particular would demand that Mīlād be more mature, tolerant and controlled, seeing as he was the eldest brother. But the child merely felt that his brother enjoyed things that he didn't, by virtue of his being younger. He was his deadly rival when it came to food, toys and his parents' attention, which he monopolised completely. Often he would sneak up on him, so as to bite or pinch him, or to snatch what he was holding and then

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[58] As in *'īd al-mīlād*, meaning "Christmas". This name is used exclusively by Egyptian Christians.

[59] Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), p. 182.

[60] *The Holy Bible*, Genesis 25:34.

> eat or smash it. His mother or father would hear his brother's shrieks of distress, and would hurry to find the cause behind this outcry. If it was his mother, she would scream at him until he would feel that she would never love him again, and he would come to her in tears, pleading for her forgiveness. If it was his father, he would beat him until he promised — and he promised frequently — not to harm his brother again. [...]
>
> The brothers grew up a little, and Mīlād understood the role his father was asking him to play. He tried hard to please his parents, so as to adapt to the small environment in which he lived, learning how to live in peace with his brother, and how to play the role of the elder brother properly.[61]

This suggests that al-Shārūnī does not support his Coptic compatriots unreservedly, but with some caution and restraint. Indeed, he appears to say that, community identity aside, the Copts should be responsible for their actions as *Egyptian* citizens, and should acknowledge their position before patriarchal (i.e. Nasser's) law. Further, while he appears to protest at the erosion of Coptic identity and rights, he also seems to warn against the association commonly made between Coptic identity and material privilege. To this end, he emphasises the spiritualism of the parents against the materialism of their sons.

Essentially, it is the narrative ethos of this text which renders it particularly "Christian" in character. It seems to caution the Copts against self-satisfaction and pride, demonstrating how even the rebellious bull is eventually overcome, and advising humility, sacrifice and dignified resistance, as demonstrated by Umm Mīlād. While 'Aṭiyya describes the text as merely a "simple story of morals",[62] it is in fact more of a parable or *exemplum*, and takes on the pedagogical role of much of the Biblical literature to which it alludes. It is also, as we have seen, a political allegory, reflecting the growing self-awareness and frustrations of the Copts, albeit calling for an end to sectarian divisions and emphasising the merits of a common, national identity. "Al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn" marks the end of a particular stage in al-Shārūnī's writing, for it is the last short story to date in which he utilises Christian characters and existents. It is also the last "traditional" story from this period (albeit peppered with

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[61] "Al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn", pp. 69-70.

modernistic elements), paving the way for a series of more mature modernistic narratives.

2. "Al-Ziḥām" ("The Crowd"), 1963

In the modernistic mode, the world is represented less in terms of a concrete, external reality, and more as an environmental "force", which shapes the lives and psychological states of characters. This next story, being the title-story of al-Shārūnī's third collection, *al-Ziḥām*, is an identifiably modernistic narrative, and is an example of psychological discourse *par excellence*. Its dramatised narrator is Fatḥī ʿAbd al-Rasūl, who, after a happy childhood in a small village community, migrates with his family to Cairo where his father hopes to find work. An under-confident, overweight adolescent, Fatḥī finds it hard to fit (literally, as well as socially) in the overcrowded streets of the bustling, hostile city. Friendless and alone, he is tortured by his deficient self-image and is bullied by his critical, overbearing father. Through his rambling and often delusional narration, we see him descend into psychosis and schizophrenia, as he struggles to contend with the pressures of city life, his feelings of sexual frustration and inadequacy, and the impact of his father's death. By the end of the text, we discover that Fatḥī is now middle-aged, and has been sequestrated in a mental institution.

The National Community Becomes the Other

In "al-Ziḥām", we see the demise of the collective national self, united under a vision of solidarity and national identity. In its place, we find an individual self, emotionally and psychologically isolated amidst a menacing, hostile crowd. The condition of the self is expressed in Fatḥī's first scene, where he tries to board a packed bus on a busy street in Cairo. As he tries in vain to push his enormous bulk into the crowd, he is ejected forcefully by the other passengers and is sent hurtling to the ground. As well as

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[62] ʿAṭiyya, op. cit., p. 209.

underscoring the self's isolation and marginalisation, this image is also a metaphor for its relationship with the other.

Fatḥī, the narrative self, is a minority figure, and is peripheral in almost every sense. In economic terms, his poverty, limited education and bleak professional prospects render him incapable of taking control of or shaping his own destiny, or of contributing to society in any distinct or meaningful way. He is anonymous and lost amidst a desperate, grasping mass, and finds that his modest goals and dreams are systematically denied him. He is also temporally and spatially alienated, existing in the present but taking refuge in the past; no longer qualifying as a villager, but feeling a stranger in the city, although he has lived there for thirty years.

In physical terms, Fatḥī is excluded due to his obesity, his body standing metonymically for all of his visible signs of difference. As Bryan Turner writes: "In contemporary society the self is [...] a representational self, whose value and meaning is ascribed to the individual by the shape and image of their external body, or more precisely, through their body-image."[63] Since Fatḥī's body is inescapable, it is always there as a reminder of his social inferiority, provoking feelings of self-loathing, abnormality and worthlessness. When he learns that he has failed to gain a place in a physical training institute, he describes himself in the most self-deprecating of terms, assimilating others' disgust by turning it against himself:

> I went home, dragging my obesity along in shame, as though creeping or crawling. My breasts were like those of a woman's, like the udders of a cow in Kūm Ghurāb, the flesh of my stomach all in folds, my buttocks flabby, a sticky, gelatinous sweat oozing slowly from every roll of fat.[64]

Perhaps the strongest indicator of Fatḥī's marginalisation is that the national collectivity has now become the other, imagined as a strange and malevolent crowd. It is no longer

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[63] Turner, Bryan S., *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory*, 2nd. ed. (London, California and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996), p. 23.

a site of belonging, but a dark and sinister mob, which scapegoats, punishes and oppresses the individual. It is the expression of a demonic human world, "a society held together by a kind of molecular tension of egos, a loyalty to the group or leader which diminishes the individual or, at best, contrasts his pleasure with his duty or honour".[65]

The narrative tensions and antagonisms between the self and the other are represented by their psychological experiences of space, and the ways in which they negotiate space and its boundaries. Fatḥī's spatial perceptions transform throughout the narrative: on first arriving in the city, he brandishes his obesity candidly, remembering that in the countryside "the vast open spaces could accommodate fat *and* thin".[66] Yet he soon becomes conscious of a difference in urban proxemics: the city and its inhabitants resent his obesity, interpreting it as an offence against nature, or a wilful defiance of the spatial status quo. As we have seen already in "al-Nās Maqāmāt", every one has his place in the national collectivity, and to go beyond this is to threaten its order and security.

Desperate to feel at home in the crowd, Fatḥī remarks: "Amid the bustle and crowding of the city I was forced to get rid of my obesity, so as to make room for the others and find a breathing space for myself."[67] His self-identity hinges on others' perceptions of his body, and on his awareness that his self-image is incompatible with his circumstances. His obesity is a handicap with more than superficial ramifications: it is the source of the other's prejudice and hostility; it denies him the right to friends, jobs, respect and happiness. Even after losing weight, he remains on the periphery: he is neither fat nor thin, but merely "squashed-up".[68]

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[64] "Al-Ziḥām", p. 10.
[65] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 147.
[66] "Al-Ziḥām", p. 5.
[67] Ibid., p. 5.
[68] Ibid., p. 5.

Fatḥī's anxiety is a particularly metropolitan phenomenon. Here we see Cairo under Fatḥī's appalled gaze, when he first arrives from the country:

> The big city dazzled me with its vastness and overcrowding; it was as though a thousand *mawlid*s were taking place all at once. We had clearly come too late, for there was no room left for any more people. When I saw the buildings, with their towering edifices and many floors, I was amazed at how the houses perched one above the other, and feared constantly that their weight would send them crashing down onto their inhabitants. For the first time I saw trams and buses packed with people, also jamming up the streets of the city. It seemed as though everyone — men and women, young and old — was dashing towards something, like a flock of surging sheep on the track back to our village at sunset, each one blundering forward, forcing his way through, isolated and alone in the midst of the crowd. A deep wave of depression inundated me ... [69]

Here follows his description of his overcrowded home:

> It was a basement room with its upper half at street level, its narrow windows barred like a prison cell. Only remnants of sunlight reached it, as though our day were one long, damp twilight.
>
> In this place the rooms clung together; in the rooms when night fell, men's and womens' bodies stuck together. They reproduced like rabbits; passions flared and disputes rang out, mutual desires set sex alight. Screaming was the only language recognised by the residents of this floor — screaming in which words were not important, as though there were great distances between a man and his wife, a son and his father, a woman and her neighbours.[70]

Thus this is a world with no public/private boundaries, and where crowding is forced upon the individual. Even Fatḥī's work as a bus conductor, which finds him crushed among passengers and stuck in constant traffic jams, permits him no personal freedom or space. Hence he retreats behind psychological boundaries, with the paradoxical result that he feels isolated yet crowded all at once. This is also the cause of his defective ego: bound as he is to the crowd, he longs to extricate himself from it, but realises that he cannot survive without it. He rebels against and rejects the crowd,

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[69] Ibid., p. 7. Ironically, Fatḥī suffers from the solitude of metropolitan life, causing him to long for the community spirit of the village. As he complains: "Here you know no-one, and no-one knows you." Ibid., p. 7.

[70] Ibid., pp. 7-8.

while accepting the fact that it labels him a "lunatic".[71] Yet this is not mindless conformity; Fatḥī accepts his sequestration as a strategy for his survival, while his wilful withdrawal from his oppressive environment is also a voiceless political statement.

The Predominance of the Psychological Idiom

Fatḥī's retreat into the self, and the narrative's dependence on the psychological idiom, reflect Fatḥī's struggle to engage and cope with the external reality. He appears to be driven to madness by some nihilistic defence mechanism, which nonetheless gives him the freedom to live in a world of his own construction. In some ways, this reminds us of Maḥmūd, the intellectual anti-hero of "al-Qayẓ", although Fatḥī's situation is somewhat different: in "al-Qayẓ", Maḥmūd removes himself from society, whereas in "al-Ziḥām" we find a reciprocal process of social exclusion and withdrawal.

The first thing we remark about this psychologically-oriented discourse is that the narrator egocentrically privileges the "I", lending intensity and urgency to his narration, and exposing the compulsions that lie behind it. The fact that it starts with the opening words "I am", suggests that the narration itself is a search for identity, with Fatḥī fighting against anxiety by seeking to define himself. Dreams, illusions and hallucinations are extensively employed, seamlessly — and often disconcertingly — merging narrative reality with phantasy. The use of dreams suggests wish fulfilment in the context of repressed desire, and the displacement of guilt and fear. While these dreams have multiple lines of association, it is telling that, after having consummated his desires for his father's young widow, Fatḥī has a nightmare in which he relives the childhood drama of when he first developed his fear of crowds. In his dream he is

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[71] Fatḥī defines himself three times in the narrative, each time modifying and reconstructing his identity. First comes his statement: "I am Fatḥī 'Abd al-Rasūl, bus conductor and poet, from the village of Kūm Ghurāb, al-Wāsiṭī district, Banī Suwayf province [...]". Ibid., p. 6. Second is the definition he gives following his father's death and the onset of his affair with his step-mother 'Awāṭif: "I am Fatḥī 'Abd al-Rasūl, bus conductor, poet and lover." Ibid., p. 17). Third is the definition he gives after being admitted to the asylum: "I am Fatḥī 'Abd al-Rasūl, bus conductor, poet, lover and lunatic." Ibid., p. 21. This reflects the process of realisation and building up of identity.

again at a Sufi *dhikr*,[72] this time taking place on an overcrowded bus, while his father (his superego?), is striking him with a sword.[73] Besides lending symbolic meaning to the narrative, Fatḥī's dreams and hallucinations enhance its sense of dramatic tension, replicating the tension between ego and id, and evoking the conflicts that emerge between desire and its repression. In many scenes, dream sequences enmesh the unconscious with reality to such an extent that the reader cannot always distinguish between them, a device which reinforces the sense of narrative chaos and madness.

A highly expressionistic text, madness distorts all aspects of "al-Ziḥām", be it in the form of clinical insanity, the "madness" provoked by lust, envy or the heights of religious ecstasy, or the apocalyptic madness of life in the modern metropolis. Madness is also expressed in the way the author manipulates narrative sequence and time, sometimes to bewildering effect. The narrative order is as follows: Fatḥī begins in the present, describing (what we understand to be) himself on a street in Cairo, trying to board a bus to work. He then loops back into the past, to the time before he came to Cairo, then progresses in a chronological sequence, creating a string of flashbacks interpolated with interior monologue and snippets of dialogue, re-establishing us every so often in the present. While this sequencing of events is not especially unorthodox, what is disarming is the fact that, by the end of the story, we discover that the "present" is a temporal illusion, and that the narrator is not at a bus stop (as we had thought), but in a mental institution, acting out a scene he had played thirty years ago.

This final "twist" creates an effect of dramatic irony, and exposes the discrepancy between appearance and reality. It also disorients the reader and sheds doubt on the reliability of the narration, for, by learning at such a late stage that Fatḥī is "mad", we find ourselves questioning the reliability and authority of his narrative: is it deluded,

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[72] A communal act of devotion, where words and formulæ in praise of God are repeated, often to music and dancing.

exaggerated, or necessarily distorted? Naturally, this stems from the assumption that an unsound mind must lack rationality and reason, thereby throwing the integrity of Fatḥī's testimony into doubt. On the other hand, it may be argued that al-Shārūnī uses the "fact" of Fatḥī's insanity to make the ironic suggestion that it is the crowd that is mad. Certainly, we may argue in defence of Fatḥī's narration that his "delusions" lend a devastating insight to the text, while his overall cogency and coherence make one question the charge of insanity levelled against him.

Other aspects of the text which cause one to question its integrity include the tentative ambiguity surrounding the implicit narratee. Could the function of Fatḥī's narration be cathartic relief, with the narratee being a medical professional, for example? Or could it be that he is talking to another mental patient, or merely that he is talking to himself? The problem with this last idea is that it reinforces the image of the rambling madman, which again undermines his narration's credibility. Yet it could be that Fatḥī is narrating to himself because his is a story to which no-one will listen. In this respect, he is less of a madman than a frustrated individual, whom society is unable, or unwilling, to accommodate.

"Al-Ziḥām" is experimental in its use of language, with a compressed, dense, "crowded" style, where clause upon clause pile up on each other, building up the pressure and tempo of the text. This is combined with vivid, and often grotesque, imagery, conveying the visual and sensory impact of the overcrowded city. When talking about the countryside, however, Fatḥī's narration turns to descriptive and often lyrical language, suggesting nostalgia for his origins and contrasting sharply with his hatred and fear of the metropolis:

> I want to smell the scent of verdure, to breathe in the moonlight spreading over fields, blanketed with maize. These days I smell only sweat and bad

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[73] "Al-Ziḥām", p. 17.

> breath. At night-time the moonlight is throttled by the crush of the houses. "They have driven the moon from the city", as it says in [my] song.[74]

Much of the imagery in the text is ironic, lending a tragi-comic, if not black, humour to the discourse.[75] Fatḥī uses organic imagery to describe inanimate objects, such as buses and streets, and uses animal metaphors for humans beings, likening them and himself to cows, sheep and horses and, at the very worst, as "dangling human carcasses",[76] revealing the extent to which people have been dehumanised by their circumstances. Another example lies in the way the narrative slips rapidly through events which we may presume to be emotionally significant (such as Fatḥī's mourning for his mother),[77] yet lingers obsessively on what appear to be the most banal of details and incidents.

An ideological dimension comes to the fore through the use of two symbolic motifs: the crowd and the patriarch. The crowd motif functions as a metaphor for repression (particularly sexual and emotional), much in the manner of the heatwave in "al-Qayẓ".[78] It also has socio-political connotations: first, "the crowd" speaks of a multitude of people, alluding arguably to the Egyptian nation;[79] second, it evokes life in the modern metropolis, summoning up issues such as unstemmed population growth, rural migration and over-crowding. Less explicitly, the crowd motif also speaks of a time when Nasser's centralised hold on state and society was at its zenith, and where national identity was focused around and in the person of the president

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[74] Ibid., p. 19.

[75] Nada Tomiche observes that that text has a *grand-guignolesque* character, marked by acts of infantile violence, such as when Fatḥī bites his stepmother's nose, or considers throwing a bar of soap at his father's head. In *Histoire de la littérature romanesque de l'Égypte moderne*, introd. Jacques Berque (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1981), p. 95.

[76] "Al-Ziḥām", p. 22.

[77] "My father mourned for her, my sister mourned for her, and I mourned for her. A month after her death there was a bride in our room occupying my mother's place in the bed." Ibid. pp. 8-9.

[78] As in "al-Qayẓ", al-Shārūnī uses the weather to enhance the mood of the text. In particular, the suffocating sun is used as a metaphor for oppression and abasement; its glare provokes anger and sexual violence, its heat produces sweat and putridity.

himself. Within such an authoritarian society, the crowd is a means of disciplining the individual, reflecting the irony underpinning the myth of the collectivity: the crowd is a place of loneliness, rather than unity; it is a closed, suffocating horizon, rather than a site of freedom and limitless possibility. It shows how Egyptians were coerced into upholding the national myth, at a time when individuals were moving towards other forms of identity.

The second motif is the patriarch. Fatḥī's rigid and authoritarian father is his absolute other in almost every sense: respected, charismatic, a successful businessman, virile, he is everything his son is not. From childhood through to adulthood, Fatḥī attempts to emulate, please, and eventually rival the *paterfamilias*, but fails pitifully to do so in almost all respects. After his father dies, Fatḥī speaks frankly about the nature of their relationship, claiming that it was one of "admiration and awe rather than of affection. I admired his courage and feared his severity."[80] Again, the patriarch is a veiled political metaphor for the national *paterfamilias,* Nasser, while the parallels between domestic and political absolutism are clear. The relationship between Fatḥī and his father represents the relationship between citizen and leader, while the structure of the patriarchal household matches the structure of the public realm. Whether explicitly mentioned or merely evoked, the father is a vehicle for repression, be it political, sexual or psychological. Individual expression and sentiment are kept under restraint,[81] and attention is focused on obedience to authority, co-operation and productivity.

Other ideological ideas inform the narrative discourse. First, the text alludes to economic policy under Nasser's government, and how the individual came to be

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[79] As Gustave Le Bon writes: "An entire nation, though there may be no visible agglomeration, may become a crowd under the action of certain influences." In *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (London: Ernest Benn, 1947), p. 25.

[80] "Al-Ziḥām", p. 10.

[81] Thus we see how Fatḥī's father scorns his son's attempts at writing poetry, and how Fatḥī cannot cry when his father dies.

treated as a unit of productivity. Second, it speaks of the emergence of new market forces, be they state-sponsored or otherwise. With the success of his father as a case in point, Fatḥī's narration speaks of a new breed of entrepreneurs, including landlords who build apartment blocks with ceilings so low that their inhabitants have to bend over in order to enter them;[82] bus companies who give bonuses to those conductors who pack their buses as fully (and dangerously) as possible;[83] and clubs "selling slimness" to overweight underachievers.[84] For there are many like Fatḥī in this competitive society; at the sports club he notes: "There I found scores of others, each one doing arduous exercises in the hope of making himself a little trimmer, so as to get a place in a school or government department."[85] For Fatḥī and others like him, slim people represent a "class" in themselves, with slimness a commodity signifying success, power and influence. Fatḥī must be slim to be accepted into the crowd, and to reap the benefits available to those who conform to its rules.

"Al-Ziḥām"'s vision of the overcrowded city also gives dramatic starkness to the issues of development and population growth, urban planning and the quality of modern life in general. In particular, the text passes biting comment on the standards of living in urban societies in developing countries. References to the next generation express a genuine fear for the future, as in: "If we're having to suffer crowding like this now, what will our children do?",[86] and: "Overcrowding is war. Whenever I look at my children, I worry about their future."[87] The dichotomy between the countryside of childhood and the city of adulthood reinforces the theme of social deterioration, and appears to allude to the end of a nation's innocence and idealism.

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[82] "Al-Ziḥām", p. 8.
[83] Ibid., p. 12.
[84] Ibid., p. 13. As Turner notes: "Diet is a means of regulating the self; it is a disciplinary practice which binds the individual to the collective", op. cit., p. 8.
[85] "Al-Ziḥām", p. 13.
[86] Ibid., p. 14.
[87] Ibid., p. 14.

We might argue that al-Shārūnī's concern with the marginalised individual reflects his own experience as a Christian and intellectual, for, while many Egyptians felt impotent and insignificant at this time, this was especially true of both these minorities. His portrayal of a rambling, isolated madman has a dimension of the condition of a frustrated social minority, as does the fact that society cannot — or will not — accommodate Fatḥī. In the case of the Copts, what is significant is the tragedy of the Oedipal situation, for although Fatḥī replaces his father by sleeping with his stepmother, he fails to assume his father's status, or to realise the taboo of his inner, unexpressed desire to rule. The fact that Fatḥī is dispossessed of his paternal heritage is also pertinent,[88] since this reflects the Copts' loss of rights and heritage, as we find also in "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn".

3. "Naẓariyya fi'l-Jilda al-Fāsida" ("The Broken Washer Theory"), 1966

'Alī Shalash argues that, of al-Shārūnī's first three collections, *al-Ziḥām* may be described as the most committed.[89] If we take this assessment to be true, we may go even further by suggesting that this commitment is most prominent in the next story, "Naẓariyya fi'l-Jilda al-Fāsida" ("The Broken Washer Theory").[90] Of the four short stories al-Shārūnī wrote in the 1960s, "Naẓariyya" gives the most vivid, and critical, portrayal of the socio-political transformations of this period, albeit focusing on conditions in rural, rather than urban, Egypt. Al-Shārūnī has grouped this text with his short story "al-Ḥidhā'", describing it as another of his so-called "stories of prophecy". While "al-Ḥidhā'", he claims, predicted the 1952 revolution, "Naẓariyya" anticipated the 1967 defeat, "seeing weaknesses in our system which others did not see".[91]

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[88] His stepmother declares him mad, and takes his father's business for her son.

[89] 'Alī Shalash, "Ziḥām Yūsuf al-Shārūnī" ("Yūsuf al-Shārūnī's *The Crowd*"), in Faraj, op. cit., p. 218.

[90] Hereafter cited as "Naẓariyya".

[91] Bayḍūn, op. cit. 17.

The events of "Naẓariyya" are few: the narrator, who is travelling on a train from Asyūṭ, strikes up a conversation with a second man, who boards the train at al-Minyā. This is presented in the form of a long, rarely-interrupted monologue, delivered almost exclusively on the part of the second man. His monologue takes up almost the entire narrative, and closes as the two men reach the end of their journey in Cairo. What strikes us is that, from such a chance meeting, these two men should appear to have so much in common: both are from villages in Upper Egypt; both appear to be *petit-bourgeois* intellectuals; they are of a similar age (in their fifties); and, as we learn at the end of the story, they share the same name, Ṣāliḥ. What eventually becomes clear is that this is not a conversation between two men, but an interior monologue, structured from a series of loosely-interconnected ruminations, and a mental exchange of ideas between the ego and alter ego of one man, the narrative self.

Ṣāliḥ is a self-confessed and irrepressible chatterbox, who longs to speak to others, and to share his views and opinions with them. Yet, while there are other passengers in his carriage, he appears to be reluctant to confide in them or to speak to them openly. Thus, he passes the long journey recounting anecdotes to himself about his village and its inhabitants, theorising about their attitudes, morals and motivations, and philosophising generally about human behaviour and relationships. Many of his tales revolve around recent material changes in rural Egypt, brought about by government policies designed to ameliorate the conditions of the peasantry, such as the installation of electricity cables and pumps for clean drinking water, and the setting up of new schools and clinics. He also tells us much, if not more, about popular attitudes towards these changes.

With undisguised dismay, Ṣāliḥ casts a critical eye over Nasser's "social revolution", detailing the incompetence, corruption, fraud and bureaucracy which have accompanied it. His narrative exposes the inadequacies and shortfalls of the new social order, yet lays blame in equal measure on both the government and the people. In his

view, the socialist project has misfired, due to an ideological and philosophical void between the government and its citizens; this "void", he claims, is the essence of his "Broken Washer Theory", a practical definition of which he gives below:

> The "Broken Washer Theory" is when apparatus costing thousands of pounds is set up to pump, settle, filter and sterilise water, and thousands of metres of pipes are laid to carry it finally to your home, but a small, broken washer in a tap in your house disturbs your tranquility, and makes this filtered, sterilised water [potentially] harmful to you.[92]

While the "broken washer" in the above example refers to a specifically material object, it also functions as a metaphor for what Ṣāliḥ sees as the traditional, popular (that is, unenlightened) "mentality". Egypt's rural communities were often sceptical about the changes introduced after the revolution, much of this stemming from the enduring character of traditional social and political structures, and the fact that, as Hopwood claims, "the [Egyptian] peasant does not adopt change for change's sake. He has to be convinced of its benefit and usefulness."[93] The success of the government's project demanded the transformation of the peasantry's attitudes towards lifestyle, methods of farming, and even methods of government and the law. Ṣāliḥ finds evidence of the traditional, rural "mentality" affecting a number of situations, as we see below:

> Take the electricity first, for example. Electric cables and lights were installed on the roads of our village and in some of the houses, and people started arguing. Each wanted to have a street-light in front of his house, for this is the most modern indication of proof of influence and prestige. Now this is all well and good, but for the time being — until electricity from the dam arrives — an electricity generator with only limited power has been installed. [...] The thing is, the number of lights in each house is restricted, but the people in my village (particularly those well-off ones who were able to have electricity installed in their homes), pay no attention to this information, and don't believe it. That, Sir, is the "broken washer". As soon as there is a wedding party or funeral, then extra lights are turned on, which is not allowed. And what's the result? The generator's coil burns and darkness descends on the village, and the

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[92] "Naẓariyya", pp. 43-44. It should be noted that the world *jilda* means "leather" or "skin", while the word *fāsida* means "rotten". This reflects the fact that, at this time, tap washers were commonly made of leather or rubber. As a result, they perished or eroded easily, which meant that water was wasted unless they were replaced frequently.

[93] Hopwood, op. cit., p. 172.

> damage is not repaired for weeks. Generally, the repairs need only a technician or a spare part, [but] these are only available in town, which is cut off from us by the Nile, for our village is on the east bank and the town is on the west. Thus our village is lit for a week, and then for several weeks is in darkness — imagine.
>
> Take also the matter of clean water. What do you think: until today only a minority use it, although it is available in pumps right next to their homes. The majority still prefer to fill jars from the Nile, where the shore is sandy and it takes a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes at least to wade into it — imagine. As for me, I have figured out a compromise, not between the minority and the majority in my village, but between the minority and the majority in my home (meaning myself and my wife, ha, ha, ha!): the purified water is for washing and bathing, while the Nile water is for drinking. Yes — for drinking, because my wife insists that the water from the pump is tasteless. The water from the Nile is "unspoiled" — imagine![94]

Thus we see that the broken washer is the metaphorical "weak link" which destroys the state's development project: albeit cheap, small and easy to replace, if neglected it leads to waste and has the potential for causing great damage. For this reason, Ṣāliḥ contends: "It isn't enough that we construct buildings and bring doctors and teachers; the washer must [also] be good and fit for use."[95] The broken washer also demonstrates the futility of the government's project; since the state has failed to match its financial and technological investment with the necessary educational and philosophical investment, its project is meaningless and, ultimately, wasteful.

An "In-Between" Self in Acquiescence to the Other

There are two main dimensions to Ṣāliḥ, the narrative self: first, he represents Egypt's crippled rural consciousness; second, he embodies Egypt's rural *petite bourgeoisie*. We know from his narration that he is "one of the few learned men who live in the village",[96] and that he tries (on the whole, unsuccessfully) to maintain a level of political activity and influence, drafting petitions and complaints for his peasant neighbours, or engaging in debate with the village *'umda* (headman) and other notables. In this way, he is the only connector between the narrative's various socio-economic levels. Ṣāliḥ's character lends meaning to the text in many ways: first, he is a

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[94] "Naẓariyya", pp. 44-45.
[95] Ibid., p. 44.

metaphor for Egypt's shift from feudalism to state capitalism; second, he represents the tensions and ongoing dialogue between the structures and ideologies of the old regime and the new. This is expressed in the following description, which Ṣāliḥ gives of his imaginary companion (i.e. himself):

> There are people like you in our village, my travelling companion. It's clear from your clothes, and from your way of speaking, that you are neither villager nor townsman. You have left the country behind you, but without quite reaching the city. Here you are — dressed in a *jilbāb* with an overcoat on top, a watch on your wrist, a light moustache. Your head is bare, although it is covered with black hair mingled with grey, showing you to have reached your fifties. If I had met you twenty years ago, you would undoubtedly have had a fez on your head, for its mark is still there. You have wonder in your eyes. You have the simplicity of the villager and the boldness of the townsman.[97]

This "transitional" or "in-between" dimension to the narrative self is also found in the character of Fatḥī in "al-Ziḥām", indeed it emerges as a character prototype in most of al-Shārūnī's short stories from this period. The self represents the Egyptian nation in transition, and the contradictions existing within its state and society. The sentence: "If I had met you twenty years ago, you would undoubtedly have had a fez on your head, for its mark is still there", is significant in that the symbolic absence of the fez alludes to the end of the *ancien régime*, while the fact that "its mark is still there" also demonstrates the residual influence of the old ruling class. Further, the fact that Ṣāliḥ has "left the country behind [...] but without quite reaching the city", once again suggests the failure of the government's drive towards modernisation, and also of its people (Ṣāliḥ included).

Once more we find that the self is a minority, peripheral character. A frustrated individual, Ṣāliḥ rails against what he sees as others' ignorance and lack of reason, and considers himself intellectually and ethically "superior". Yet he is a powerless and even impotent character, attested to by the fact that he is intellectually and physically crippled, unemployed and childless. He is also perceived as rather remote, his

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[96] Ibid., p. 54.

predilection for cerebral activities reflecting his distance from the processes of production in his village, and his lack of engagement with reality as experienced by the peasants. His relationship with his wife is a case in point: he is cerebral, while she is practical; he is weak, while she is "strong willed";[98] her mind is busy with what he sees as the "trivialities" of life, and she sees as its "necessities".[99] In fact, Ṣāliḥ's wife is an incarnation of the narrative other: a powerful character, she is defined by action rather than thought, and practical, rather than mental, production.

The narrative other is also a hegemonic other. It is the state, with its many supporting institutions, which manifests itself as an invisible form of control, mediated through the group. This mediation is also a form of deformation; albeit distant, the other's tentacles reach into every sphere of life, while all decisions must be taken by or through it, no matter how arbitrary or irrational these might be.[100] The narrative shows how the self is compelled to acquiesce to the other, for the sake of a quiet life or, again, for the sake of survival. We find instances of this when Ṣāliḥ argues with his wife:

> [...] she sees only her point of view, whereas he sees both his *and* hers. And what's the result? She convinces him, but he doesn't convince her; she's always in the right, and he's always in the wrong. And in the end, *she*'s the victim. Imagine. [...] She's always the one who begins the battle, and if he raises his voice in complaint (in self-defence), she punishes him with silence. Or, to put it more simply, she refuses to speak to him. She is well aware of his appetite for speaking — or, as she puts it, his appetite for "jabbering" — so she punishes him by preventing him from something as necessary to him as food and drink. He even feels as someone who is deprived of food feels; he bears the silence for a day or two, but soon feels a real hunger to speak to her.[101]

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[97] Ibid., p. 44.
[98] Ibid., p. 56.
[99] Ibid., p. 56.
[100] The power relationship between the self and the other is expressed in the relationship between the village and the *markaz*, or town centre, on the other side of the Nile. This relationship between the village and the seat of local authority is defined by geographical and politico-ideological distance, representing the distance between the countryside and Cairo, the locus of power.
[101] "Naẓariyya", pp. 55-56.

In view of the fact that this text was written at a time when political expression was very heavily censored, Ṣāliḥ's wife's stratagem of forcing her husband into silence may also be seen as an allusion to the government's silencing of its people.

Strategies of Self-Censorship and Concealment

"Naẓariyya" is a multi-layered narrative structure. It is a narrative with another embedded within it, as we find in *The Thousand and One Nights*, for example. The text even affirms this; at one point Ṣāliḥ remarks: "I no longer felt that you were delivering a lecture as much as narrating stories, perhaps in the manner of *The Thousand and One Nights*, one story behind another, as though you had a never-ending stream of them."[102] Ṣāliḥ is the narrator of the outer narration or frame story, within which his alter ego narrates its own interior monologue. In this way, he is in the unusual position of simultaneously assuming the roles of narrator, narratee and narrative subject.

The content of "Naẓariyya" has an academic, and at times "scientific", quality, perhaps reflecting the state's preoccupation at this time with Egypt's scientific and technological development. Even Ṣāliḥ presents his own scientific theories, such as his "electro-sexual theory", which he explains as follows:

> When every man looks at a woman, electro-magnetic (that is magnetised, electric) rays come out of his eyes, penetrating her clothes and drawing her towards him. This is an interpretation of sexual attraction; the level of electromagnetic conductivity is relative to the woman's beauty and charm. The prettier or more charming she is, the stronger the conductivity will be. It is also relative in opposition to her age, so the more advanced in years she is, the more her conductivity declines.[103]

Academia and science also influence the form of the text, which is divided into three sections, "introduction", "proof" (or "evidence") and "result", much in the manner of a scientific text or essay. In the introductory section, the broken washer theory is

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[102] Ibid., p. 49.

defined; in the second section various examples of its application or manifestation are given; and in the third section a conclusion is reached on the strength of what has gone before it. This academic form signifies two main points: first, it underlines the instructive, or educational, dimension to the narrative; second, it reflects class register.

At first sight, the narrative is deceptive in that its plot appears to have little action (that is, if we adhere to the conventional introduction → complication → resolution model of narrative). What this signifies is that, rather than tending towards *physical* action, the plot reflects a process of *mental* action. In this way, the narrative functions as a mental, philosophical or ideological journey (— its setting on a train should not go unnoticed here). The texture of the text is tense, marked as it is by Ṣāliḥ's compulsive chatter, and the fact that his narration goes through a series of rises and falls. These rises and falls reflect narrative shift: many episodes are narrated out of chronological order, as Ṣāliḥ begins to relate a tale, diverts the course of his narration, then reverts back. Although this cyclical, or periodic, feature can at times be long-winded and frustrating for the reader, it is effective in that it reflects the natural patterns of conversational speech. This is reinforced by the use of *skaz*-like characteristics, such as extremely long and spontaneous sentences and paragraphs; the repeated use of discourse linkers and conversational tags such as "as for...", "the thing is" and "imagine"; idiomatic expressions; repeated rhetorical questions such as "and what's the result?"; and various forms of exaggeration.

Ṣāliḥ's narration is closely connected to the movement of the train; its rhythmic motion corresponding to his train of thought. Once the train enters al-Gīza station, the narrative comes to an abrupt end; the carriage within which the frame story is set functioning as a narrative (and, more significantly, an ideological) "vacuum", beyond which Ṣāliḥ's narration cannot continue. Notably, whenever the train stops — at a station for example, or where it seems at one point to break down — Ṣāliḥ stops his

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[103] Ibid., p. 47. Clearly, the "scientific" calibre of his theory is debatable!

narration, as though he is wary of the impingement of the ears and eyes of others, and as though only the noisy, moving carriage permits him to express himself freely. When speaking of his "travelling companion"(i.e. his alter ego), Ṣāliḥ remarks: "I only noticed his presence when the train moved off",[104] which suggests that he only found his voice, or indeed became conscious of the urgings of his critical self, once the train was in motion.

Ṣāliḥ's engagement with his narrating alter ego is in fact an engagement with his critical self. Such a split in the narrative self is indicative of two things: the externally-/self-imposed suppression of the critical self, and the prevailing climate of fear in which this condition comes about. Enmeshed in the negativity of his situation, Ṣāliḥ uses his alter ego as a means of deferring responsibility; it is a platform and sounding board for his own ideas, it reflects his theories and opinions, yet is does not expose them as such. As he is careful to assert: "At times I was lucky and could make his voice out, at others our voices mingled with the noise of the train, so that I could not tell whether it was his voice or mine I was hearing."[105] Through his dialogue with his alter ego, Ṣāliḥ can also discover and/or re-affirm himself, by the reflexive recounting of his own self-narrative. However, since the political climate dictates that Ṣāliḥ cannot reveal himself openly, he assigns another level of identity to himself, by discussing himself with his alter ego in the third person. Again, by doing so, he avoids the responsibility of the use of the "I", and puts a cautious distance between himself and his narrative subject.

"Naẓariyya" is both an embodiment and a critique of ideology; it is also politically committed in that it addresses the many problems in Egyptian society, and because it fulfils what Sartre calls "action by disclosure".[106] It discloses so as to bring about the

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[104] Ibid., p. 43.
[105] Ibid., p. 43.
[106] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Writing, Reading and the Public", in Dennis Walder (ed.), *Literature in the Modern World* (Oxford: O.U.P, 1990), p. 83.

change that the nation needs, its goal being "to reveal the world and particularly to reveal man to other men so that the latter may assume full responsibility before the object which has been thus laid bare".[107] Albeit self-censored at times to the point of obliqueness, and generally non-confrontational in tone, "Naẓariyya" nonetheless exhorts the Egyptian reader to bring about change, for both the good of the self and also the collectivity. The ethos underpinning the text is expressed in Ṣāliḥ's theory of "the absolute good", which he sets out as follows:

> "The absolute good" is the happiness felt on undertaking something which is completely equal to the happiness derived by its recipient. It is an act which is both self-affirming and affirms others at the same time, so that your happiness and others' happiness become one thing, to the point where you do not know whether you are realising your desire or someone else's, for it is only one desire that is being realised. If this occurs between two individuals it is the "absolute good", whereas if it occurs between the individual and the group (as with the artist or scientist who is pleased with his work, which others are also pleased with and find useful), then this is the "beyond-absolute". As to if it occurs between one group and another, such as between one state and another, then this is the "absolute of the absolute".[108]

Ṣāliḥ's theory of "the absolute good" is a reaction to his realisation that, in Egyptian society, "there is always a side which tries to benefit at the expense of the other, not knowing that, through destroying the other it destroys itself".[109] A prime example of this is the phenomenon of corruption, be it at the hands of peasants, landowners or functionaries of the state. In some cases, corruption is simply a means of survival, which, for the poorest folk, must be attained at any price. For others, corruption is nothing more than cynical opportunism, as we find with Ṣāliḥ's example of Doctor Shunayṭa, the government medic, who:

> [...] transformed the government medical centre into his own private clinic. An examination cost thirty piastres and a home visit a full pound. Free medicine went the same way. Every medical test had its price; surgical operations were done only after the price was agreed; a hospital bed cost fifty piastres a day. The lab assistant, the health worker, the clerk, the warehouse manager and the nurse got their share of the loot, too. Bandages had a price,

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[107] Ibid., p. 83.

[108] "Naẓariyya", pp. 47-48.

[109] Ibid., p. 64.

> injections in the muscle had a price, and intravenous injections another. You ask how our village can be satisfied with this? I say that it was the village that asked for it, that it forced the doctor to do what he did.[110]

Dr Shunayṭa, and the profiteering locals with whom he collaborates, show how this is a society which promotes the survival of the corrupt, rather than of the honest. Indeed, in such a society, "honesty" or "goodness" are merely perceived as forms of weakness.[111] This reveals one stark, yet inescapable, truth: that the nationalist philosophy as promoted by Nasser's regime had not yet been internalised successfully by society.

Besides urging Egyptians to embrace the ideal behind his "theory of the absolute good", Ṣāliḥ also stresses the importance of collective responsibility, as expressed in his "totality theory". The "totality theory" argues that "the state is one indivisible whole. An act cannot be defective without this meaning that all remaining acts will be defective too."[112] His theory supports the view that all deeds are interconnected, and, above all, that people learn from the example they are set. In Ṣāliḥ's view, the new regime is merely emulating the old: autocratic and self-serving, its doctrinairism is an impediment to the progress it seeks to attain. He gives the example of the newly-opened village school, where he is refused a job due to his age and his amputated leg, although he has had a long and successful career as a teacher. Predictably, those teachers who work at the school (who have been recruited from the town), waste half of their day travelling, and are unmotivated and idle:

> The thing is, its ten teachers all live in the town — imagine — while the Headteacher is from one of the villages in the west. So the entire teaching staff crosses the Nile to our village in the morning, and goes back in the afternoon. Manṣūr, the school porter, is the only one from the village. He opens the school doors in the morning, and some of the children come and play in the yard until ten or eleven o'clock — imagine. Only then do the teachers begin to arrive, some of them coming and others not, although the truth must be said

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[110] Ibid., p. 50

[111] Although Ṣāliḥ reveals that "he is described in the village as 'a good man'", he also adds, "perhaps this 'goodness', Sir, is a polite expression for 'weakness'". Ibid., p. 56.

[112] Ibid., p. 62.

> that the principal is absent the least. And so the school runs by the grace of God. As for the inspectors, well, there's no danger from them, for His Excellency the Inspector can only come to our village after announcing his intention to visit first, at which the staff send a donkey or horse from the village to bring him over, instead of him being stuck in the sand on the waterfront for fifteen to twenty minutes. As for the women teachers, there is nothing to stop those who actually attend from simply leaving the children to play, sometimes fighting to the point of violence, while they are busy chatting or knitting. In short, as they say, our school is a "free-for-all" — the broken washer again, Sir.[113]

Thus there is clear political intent in Ṣāliḥ's argument that "teaching is not merely dictating information; a child learns more from his teacher's actions than from what his teacher says".[114]

In spite of its many layers of self-censorship and concealment, "Naẓariyya" has a tangible authorial presence, and appears to be structured around al-Shārūnī's own ideological principles. We might even argue that the author uses Ṣāliḥ as a persona, disguising his own identity, and thereby protecting himself from any possible reprisals. Key to the text is the theme of the "crisis of civilisation", which al-Shārūnī first touched on in "al-Ḥidhā'", and develops further here. Founded on the view that civilisation, social and political degradation are all interconnected, it was theory of the this crisis of civilisation which underpinned al-Shārūnī's prediction of the 1967 defeat. In the short stories he wrote after "Naẓariyya", this theme re-emerges with ever-growing frequency, a point we will return to in the final chapter.

4. "Lamaḥāt min Ḥayāt Mawjūd 'Abd al-Mawjūd" ("Glimpses from the Life of Mawjūd 'Abd al-Mawjūd"), 1969

There are three different versions of this short story, the first and last of which will be referred to here. The earliest version, published in *al-Majalla* in 1969,[115] went on to appear in the collection *al-Ziḥām*, although this was only one of a number of drafts in existence when the collection was being prepared for printing. With the appearance of

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[113] Ibid., p. 53.
[114] Ibid., p. 63.

what al-Shārūnī claimed was the "final" version two years later, he observed: "Perhaps a comparison between the two versions can clarify the extent to which the story benefits from — or is harmed by — long contemplation and [having] multiple versions."[116] In fact, the introduction to the story was modified slightly later that year, and thus it is this third version which qualifies as the actual, final version.[117]

Mawjūd 'Abd al-Mawjūd is a teacher of philosophy, who first comes to Cairo as a university student, and rents a room from a middle-aged widow, Madīḥa. An inhibited and introverted young man, Mawjūd's experiences with people have taught him to fear and dread them, yet he yearns nonetheless for the comfort of companionship. Madīḥa seduces Mawjūd, although he is frightened by her boldness and confident sexuality. She arranges for Mawjūd to marry her daughter, Zaynab, then takes him into her flat as her son-in-law and lover. It is not long before Zaynab discovers her mother and husband together, locked inside a room to which she holds a duplicate key. She throws herself to her death from the roof of Madīḥa's building, leaving only her red velvet slippers — a wedding gift from Mawjūd — behind.

Stricken with fear, Mawjūd retreats back into his room, while Madīḥa takes to pacing the streets barefoot, carrying Zaynab's slippers and announcing: "Sins we committed and Your eye sleeps not. O Lord of Mankind, you have taken a terrible vengeance."[118] Henceforth, the mother is called "Shaykha" Madīḥa by those who see her transformation as divinely-inspired. For Mawjūd, however, the slippers are a ghoulish reminder of Zaynab, and he is anxious to retrieve them and lay her memory to rest. As he contends:

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115 "Lamaḥāt min Ḥayāt Mawjūd 'Abd al-Mawjūd", hereafter cited as "Lamaḥāt".

116 In his introduction to "Lamaḥāt min Ḥayāt Mawjūd 'Abd al-Mawjūd wa Mulāḥaẓatān" ("Glimpses from the Life of Mawjūd 'Abd al-Mawjūd and Two Postcripts"), *Gālirī 68*, p. 48.

117 Also entitled "Lamaḥāt min Ḥayāt Mawjūd 'Abd al-Mawjūd wa Mulāḥaẓatān", it appeared in *al-Khawf wa'l-Shajā'a*, op. cit., and was reprinted in *al-Majmū'āt*, vol. 2, pp. 29-54. Hereafter cited as "Mulāḥaẓatān".

118 "Lamaḥāt", p. 33.

> These slippers were my secret and my enemy, my fear and my worry; it was I who had bought them and I who had made a gift of them, so they were from me and belonged to me. Why, then, should someone else take possession of them, so as to threaten me with them and compromise me?[119]

The slippers take their revenge by implicating Mawjūd in yet another death: Madīḥa's. One night, amidst a struggle to snatch the slippers back from her, Mawjūd strikes Madīḥa on the head, and leaves her unconscious on the floor in her hallway. With horror, he soon realises two terrible facts: first, that Madīḥa has hold of a small scrap of velvet, torn from the heel of one of the shoes, and second, that a stench has started to issue from her flat. After calling the police, Mawjūd learns that Madīḥa has been found dead, having died within less than a day of their encounter. Here is his reaction to the news of her death:

> I wonder if there has been a crime? And if so, who are the accused and who are the witnesses? Do you suppose I will be a witness or one of those accused? And if I am accused, what will this accusation amount to? Do you think it could lead to my being found guilty?[120]

Mawjūd is interrogated by the police, but conceals the nature of his relationship with Madīḥa, and neglects to mention their violent altercation. He is freed, but remains unconvinced by his freedom, arguing: "When the investigator let me go I didn't believe him — he was looking at me with complete suspicion. He'll make me believe that I am free so as to spy on me and expose me by my conduct and movements."[121] Condemned thus to exist, Mawjūd retreats into the cell-like confines of his room, from where he pronounces: "So as to safeguard my freedom, I have confiscated my freedom. I myself have placed myself under arrest, so as to spare someone else the effort of arresting me."[122] In effect, this pronouncement is an admission of guilt and, in the long-term, a self-imposed death sentence.

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[119] Ibid., p. 35.
[120] Ibid., p. 28.
[121] Ibid., p. 38.

Fear as the Other, the Self under Siege

Mawjūd is the most marginalised of all the selves we have examined thus far. He is a self under siege, severed from society by both choice and by necessity. He inhabits a world of uncertainty, ambiguity and contradictions; his attempts at self-preservation lead only to self-annihilation; his response to the world around him both protects him and destroys him at once. The self is an essentially passive creature, who is unable (or even unwilling) to exercise his free will. Rather, he slips helplessly and irretrievably down his predetermined course, seeming somehow to suggest that to resist this would be futile.[123] Indeed, it is almost as though Mawjūd's crime — which he cannot quite determine, and therefore does not know whether he has committed it or not — were a *fait accompli* even before its event.

The identity of the self is constructed on the basis of fear. Fear, indeed, is its *raison d'être*, as we note when Mawjūd pronounces his *cogito* to be: "I fear, therefore I am."[124] Fear is the very essence of the self's existence, evidence of which we find in the first sentence of the text: "In the beginning was fear. All things were with it, and without it nothing came into being."[125] Yet, conversely, fear is also self-eradicating: in his fear of being convicted, Mawjūd destroys all of his personal documents and memories, and thereby destroys his own history; he denies his very existence by pretending to his friends and family that he is dead; he even destroys his own identity by taking an assumed name and profession. Fear also constructs the identity of the collective narrative self: all-pervasive, it paralyzes socially and psychologically, creating a world of tension, half-truths and accusations, against which the individual has no means of defence. In short, fear assumes the nature of a non-tangible superego, and seems in many ways to function like an Orwellian Big Brother. Because of fear,

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[122] "Mulāḥaẓatān", p. 52.

[123] Strangely, even before the affair between Madīḥa and Mawjūd has begun, local gossips have insinuated a relationship between them. Although Mawjūd attempts half-heartedly to resist Madīḥa's advances, he succumbs finally, on the basis that "there was no sense in being accused of something of which we were innocent". "Lamaḥāt", p. 27.

[124] Ibid., pp. 25 and 27.

life for the individual and the collectivity becomes an enigma, filled with double-meanings, doubts, illusions and distortions.

Fear, in effect, is the narrative other. Intimidating and predatory, it spies on and harasses the self, manipulating and controlling its fate. It moulds the self into a forced homogeneity, where all forms of difference are negated or diluted. The other takes form in the text's many agents of authority, such figures evoking (as they do in "al-Ziḥām") the national patriarch, Nasser, or the national superego, the state. Although the self is resigned to its subordination to the other, it discovers, on occasions, that the other can offer comfort, and even security. We see this when Mawjūd describes the sexual act with Madīḥa (which he simultaneously longs for and dreads), as "hiding my fear in the source of my fear".[126] Equally, while Mawjūd fears illness, the death of his parents, personal failure and even success,[127] he also learns that his fearing is an act of protection, for both himself and those close to him.

Under the watchful eye of the other, the self denies and attempts to eradicate all expressions of individuality. Cautiously ambivalent, the self is anxious not to be seen to take a particular side or viewpoint, and exists in a state of inbetween-ness, suspended between times, places, people, events and ideas. Ambivalence, in fact, is a condition of its survival, although the gradual erosion and nullification of its identity means that only a mask, or a shell, of the self remains. For Mawjūd, such a half-lived existence proves an even greater punishment than death itself.

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[125] Ibid., p. 25.

[126] Ibid., p. 31. In this respect, Mawjūd reminds us of Sayyid Affandī 'Āmir in "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis".

[127] Mawjūd tells of how he fears that his students will do well, since this will expose him to the attentions of vindictive colleagues, who will accuse him of giving his students the questions before the exam. See "Mulāḥaẓatān", p. 46.

Enigma and Ambiguity, Contrast and Contradiction

"Lamaḥāt" is the narrative successor to "al-Ziḥām". Both texts share common characters, themes and motifs; they have distinct structural and rhetorical features; and they examine similar aspects of individual and collective identity. Indeed, we may suggest that "al-Ziḥām" serves as a blueprint for "Lamaḥāt", particularly in view of certain prominent themes (such as being, death, ego, power, fear), all of which are treated from the same psychological perspective. The two main anti-heroes, Fatḥī and Mawjūd, are interchangeable in many ways: both are male, and of the same class and rural origins; in the city they experience the same social stigmas and sense of cultural alienation; and both are selves in exile, having no true refuge in which to escape from their anxieties. Mawjūd is more of an intellectual than Fatḥī, however, and thus his narration has more of a philosophical slant.

"Lamaḥāt" is an enigmatic and often obscure text, replete with ambiguities and riddled with contradictions. It is also highly experimental, and we find strong interconnections between form and content, language and structure. Dramatic tension is built up through both the narrative and the discourse: through the slowly unravelling plot, and through devices such as the stream of consciousness, interior monologue and association. These produce a dislocated, convoluted text, where ideas are randomly juxtaposed, and where development is often digressive or illogical. Narrative order is also haphazard, and largely in reverse, lending suspense (and often confusion) to our processing of the plot, while enhancing our enjoyment of its "mystery" or "crime" themes.[128] In fact, the text helps us to anticipate this strategy, since Mawjūd announces at the outset "let's start the story from its end".[129]

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[128] As Davaid Lodge notes: "Most examples of radical experiment with narrative chronology that come to mind seem to be concerned with crimes, misdemeanours and sins." *The Art of Fiction* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), p. 79.

[129] "Lamaḥāt", p. 25.

Besides its main plot, the text also contains numerous sub-plots, forming many different layers representing different levels of Mawjūd's experience. This laying, and overlaying, of plot and sub-plots supports two of the text's main themes: concealment and the subsumation of the self. An intense, first-person narration, we are struck by the extent to which Mawjūd repeats the "I", as though to confront or to allay his ontological uncertainties. Ironically, his anxious, and sometimes desperate, repetition of the "I" betrays his lack of control over his situation, and lends no real authority to his narration. When narrating, he tends to stay largely on the surface, reporting external impressions and facts simply, and giving few superfluous details of people or events. In this way, the narrative discourse tends to evoke sensations (of fear, menace, desire, torture and so on), rather than describe them explicitly. Two notable exceptions of detailed external description relate to Madīḥa (of whom he gives relatively detailed descriptions, including a lyrical description of their first sexual encounter), and his room. Here follows a description of Madīḥa's hands:

> How often had I kissed those supple, soft-skinned, tender hands. Now one of them had sprouted the claws of a lioness defending her cub, while on the back of the other I saw protruding veins, close to my eyes, as though I were looking through a microscope. It was so close to my mouth that I was tempted to bite it — gnaw at it, even;[130]

and this is his description of his room:

> It is my fortress and it is my snare. I know it now with all of my senses: the colours of its walls, its windows and its tiles; what has stayed the same there, and what has changed. Its cobwebby corners up by the ceiling; its dusty corners down by the floor. Its smell when it has stayed locked up a long time, and when I cook my food in it, and when I open the adjoining toilet. I even know the taste and touch of the lower walls: salty, crumbly and white. They become thinner day by day, and I am terrified that one morning I will find that they have been completely eaten away — then all of my plans will collapse from their foundations. As for its sounds, I am fully acquainted with them: mysterious, wary sounds. What scares me about them is that they come from unknown places. Trying to define them gives me peace of mind: perhaps a mouse nibbling at scraps of food in the dustbin; perhaps a cockroach gaily amusing itself in the toilet. And there are other noises, distant or close, above or below, which grow louder in the stillness and darkness of the night: two

[130] Ibid., p. 35.

> cats whispering or fighting with each other, a dog barking, a foot creeping, things breaking.[131]

While both are fundamentally banal descriptions, they evoke the bizarreness and precariousness of Mawjūd's existence, revealing a sinister, at times unnerving, gloomy and ghastly world, marked by anxiety, oppression, ennui and despair. In the first example, the fact that Mawjūd contemplates biting Madīḥa's hand reveals an absurd, if only fleeting, moment of introspection, at what is in fact the most critical juncture in the narrative. It shows the self's desire to extricate itself from the outside world, to turn inwards, and thereby defend itself and be defended.

Mawjūd's use of language is often highly poetic, its rhythm and music lending much to the narrative structure. In particular, he employs numerous repetitive strategies, such as thematic repetition (he is lonely, the room is lonely), and lexical repetition, as in: "Leaving the key, the key to the door of the house with her, was our first line of defence. Leaving the key, the key to the door of the room in its keyhole, was our second line of defence."[132] We also find repetition of verb endings (giving a Qur'anic character to the language of certain passages), assonance, and parallelism, as in: "The house looks onto a courtyard; in the courtyard is a *mawlid*;[133] at the *mawlid* are seventy thousand persons; every person has seventy thousand hands; in every hand are seventy thousand slippers; in every slipper are seventy thousand candles."[134] These devices are not merely concerned with linguistic texture, but also develop the narrative's layered, inwardly-spiralling plot and structure.

The author adds to the sense of enigma and ambiguity by making selective use of defamiliarised images and thought-provoking form. Notably, the original version

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[131] Ibid., pp. 40-41.
[132] Ibid., p. 32.
[133] In this context, a Sufi saint's anniversary celebration
[134] "Lamaḥāt", p. 32. This rhythmic, incantatory sentence is suggestive of the whirling motions of Sufi worship.

opens with a "triadic introduction", setting the tone of the text and condensing its dominant themes and keywords:

> *Triadic introduction*:[135]
>
> The beginning: In the beginning was fear, all things were with it, and without it nothing came into being. This was in the beginning.
> Being: I fear, therefore I am.
> Synthesis: My fear gives me security ... and protection.
>
> *The event*
>
> The two candles went out: the girl and her mother, my wife and my mistress, and all that remains is the slippers.[136]

This introduction is a summary of the text's three main philosophies: the theological (with its allusions to the Gospel of St. John); the rational (with its allusions to the Cartesian *cogito*); and the dialectical (with its allusions to Hegelian contradictions). Hegel and Descartes are in dialogue in the text, as we see with Mawjūd's dialectical examination of the nature of his existence and non-existence.[137] Beginning with the proposition that he exists because he fears, he then works through a series of negations (or antitheses), and ends with the view that fear has destroyed his existence, asserting: "I fear, therefore I am not."[138]

Dialectics between opposites are also evident in al-Shārūnī's employment of thesis and antithesis, where opposing or contrasting clauses or sentences are used, containing contradictory or contrasting forms of words, such as: "Ambiguity on the lips of clarity;

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[135] "Introduction" (*iftitāḥiyya*) may also be translated as "overture", i.e. it opens the work and contains its major themes.

[136] "Lamaḥāt", p. 25. The triadic introduction appears in the original version only. The final version begins with the following quote: "The present is a time suspended between two times, for the past has determined the destiny of the future. It is caught between them, unable to escape from either." See "Mulāḥaẓatān", p. 29.

[137] Note that the name Mawjūd means "existing", or "existent".

[138] "Lamaḥāt", p. 42.

the secret is about to become a scandal";[139] "Just as fear had brought me down, so fear took me up"; and:[140]

> From that day, whenever I felt secure I was frightened, and whenever I was frightened I felt secure. Whenever I felt secure I foresaw misfortune, and whenever I was frightened I protected myself and was protected.[141]
>
> What I desire I do not achieve and what I achieve I do not desire, and between the desire that is not achieved and the achievement I do not desire falls my existence.[142]

This dialectical dimension underlines a dualism in the narrative, which is evident in the following passage:

> There isn't much furniture in my room: a chair, the seat of which I sit on and on the back of which I hang my suit; a table, for writing at and eating at; a sofa, which my guests sat on by day, and which I sleep on at night; a glass, from which I sometimes drink, and in which I sometimes put the sweet peas I like. Everything in my room is dual-purpose, even the newspaper which the vendor throws under the door each morning, in which I follow the news of my charge, and which I then use as a tablecloth.[143]

Even fear has a dual dimension in this text: on the one hand, it protects Mawjūd, since it inhibits him and stops him from making mistakes and potentially exposing himself, while on the other hand, fear destroys him and his ability to live.

Written during an era of surveillance and intimidation, when many aspects of civil life were dualistic in nature, "Lamaḥāt" reveals the dualistic (and duplicitous) nature of fear. In certain ways, this connects with al-Shārūnī's own reality, since questions of fear, being and contradiction were as much a part of the Coptic reality at this time as they were of the liberal intellectual's reality. In this context, the dialecticism and dualism so characteristic of this narrative are in effect a form of self-censorship; like Mawjūd, the author is self-aware, and strives to be non-committal and — where

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[139] Ibid., p. 34.
[140] Ibid., p. 33.
[141] Ibid., p. 37.
[142] "Mulāḥaẓatān", p. 46.
[143] "Lamaḥāt", pp. 25-26.

necessary — to contradict himself. As one scholar observes: "The presence of political suppression in the consciousness of Arab writers turns it into a kind of internal censor that controls the writer from within and makes him reproduce this suppression and disseminate it around him."[144] Thus Mawjūd's statement that he is "the victim of a bitter struggle between a belief I do not act upon and an action I do not believe in, and a shame that is even more bitter, since what I reveal is different to what I conceal",[145] is as applicable to his creator as it is to himself.

Hafez notes that al-Shārūnī "uses a technique that may be called duality of perspective, a technique associated with the treatment of the favourite theme of the modernists, the relativity of truth".[146] In "Lamaḥāt", this theme may also be considered from the Hegelian view that the truth can only be found in the whole. In most instances, the whole is withheld from Mawjūd (as we find even in the case of Zaynab's slippers), while in others it is Mawjūd who withholds the part from the whole.[147] Whatever the case, since Mawjūd can never see the totality of his situation, his assessment of what is "true" is necessarily incomplete. Nor is there even much likelihood of the truth emerging; as Mawjūd explains, the truth is "known to no-one, not even to myself".[148]

Besides references to the New Testament and the ideas of Descartes and Hegel, there is other evidence of intertextuality in this narrative, with most instances pointing to the influence of Kafka and Camus. Kafka is most discernible in the use of themes such as the end of innocence and idealism, horror, pleasure and death. In particular, the text owes much to Kafka's novel *The Trial*, since Mawjūd bears distinct similarities to Joseph K, who cannot find out for what crime he has been arrested, and

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[144] 'Abd al-Nabī Ṣtaif, "The Question of Freedom in Modern Arabic Literary Criticism", *JAL*, 26 (1-2), March-June 1995, p. 166.
[145] "Mulāḥaẓatān", p. 45.
[146] Hafez, "The Modern Arabic Short Story", p. 329.
[147] Describing his police interrogation, he confesses to the reader: "I stood before the investigator and told him half the facts, hiding and denying the other half." "Mulāḥaẓatān", p. 45.

who is "freed", but whose file is never closed. As an anti-hero caught somewhere between innocence and guilt, Mawjūd also resembles Mersault in Camus' *L'Étranger*. The theories of Freud are once again prominent, as with the recurring Oedipal theme (Mawjūd effectively sleeps with his mother, since Madīḥa is his mother-in-law), and the theme of the defence of the self via return to the mother's womb,[149] in itself another manifestation of the Oedipal condition.

Concealed within the many layers of this text, we find a multitude of ideological ideas. The prominence of the fear motif is perhaps the most revealing: as the defining characteristic of life in modern Egypt, fear alludes once more to the political establishment, and to the social and psychological impact of modernisation. Fear is an indication of death within life itself: the death of the spirit, the death of creativity, the death of free expression, and the death of the individual. Thus Mawjūd finds no alternative but to declare: "There is no escaping from the fact that my life is my affliction, and that my very existence is the essence of my tragedy."[150] Above all, "Lamaḥāt" is informed by anti-authoritarian ideas, attested to by the stark and uncompromising way in which it represents the subject as a number, case or file, and by the way in which Mawjūd tries to determine his own fate, even if this means that he must cut himself off from society. As he claims: "My motto is: 'Better by my own hand than by the hand — or grip, or fist, even — of another'."[151]

Conclusion

In this fourth chapter, al-Shārūnī's short stories have moved through the realist, symbolic and absurdist modes. The first text, "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn", is the most realistic, and still clings to the ideals of nationalist rhetoric, particularly the notion that individual interests must be sacrificed for the sake of national unity. What is apparent,

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[148] "Lamaḥāt", p. 38.
[149] Ibid., pp. 39-40.
[150] "Mulāḥaẓatān", p. 49.
[151] Ibid., p. 52.

however, is that the national collectivity is already fragmenting, a fact which becomes clearer by the second short story, "al-Ziḥām". Feelings of cynicism and disenchantment with the regime are even more pronounced in "Naẓariyya", which exposes the futility of state doctrinairism, and its blind insistence on principles without practical application.

In "al-Ziḥām" and "Lamaḥāt" we find a particular, "in-between" type of self, being of rural origin, caught between tradition and modernity, and severed from local social structures. It is a self which attempts to assert its individual identity, as a means of resistance to or rebellion against the imposition of a collective identity. As a result, external criteria for identification are replaced by attempts to locate identity in the interiority of characters. As such, both "al-Ziḥām" and "Lamaḥāt" have profoundly psychological plots, and depend less on external action than earlier stories. What is notable is that rural life is idealised in this chapter, and is seen to have a "superior" set of values to urban life. The innocence of childhood is also stressed, being an ironic metaphor for a national population which is becoming increasingly cynical. Both of these features reflect the onset of an ideological crisis, as unifying values collapse, and the author hearks nostalgically to a golden age, which has been replaced by contradictions, double-meanings and ambiguities.

By this stage in the development of the dynamic narrative self, the self, along with its dreams and ideals, has been crushed by the other. Traces of rebellion and rejection are in evidence, but are cloaked in the language of dreams, and symbols. With the other now perceived as a source of terror and tyranny, the self fears, both for itself and for the group as a whole. In all, the narrative self during this phase may be described as "schizophrenic". The other has now taken over and is in the ascendant, co-opting the self selectively in order to serve its own ends. It has socialised the self to the point where it has subsumed it, and has reduced relations once founded on love, respect and

loyalty to relations founded on pragmatism, cynicism and betrayal. Self-other perceptions may be summarised as follows:

SELF	OTHER
Fearing, oppressed	Fear, oppressor,
Crushed, under siege	Crushing, besieging
Internal censor	External censor
Fear of present, fear for future	Mastery over present and future
Needs the other to survive	Self-sustaining
Fragmented identity	"Unified" identity
Rejects myth of national ideal	Sustains myth of national ideal

Chapter Five

The Self and the Other in a Polarised Society

This last chapter covers twenty-five years, from July 1970, the publication date of al-Shārūnī's short story "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh" ("The Mother and the Beast"),[1] to 1995, with the publication of his last short story to date, "al-Daḥk Ḥatā al-Bukā'" ("From Laughter to Tears").[2] Visibly, it is the longest period under review in this thesis. Although this time-frame was witness to such major historical events as the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the Camp David Accords and the assassination of President Anwar Sadat, the principle organising factor behind this chapter is al-Shārūnī's fictional output itself, which, in the 1970s at least, was substantially smaller than in previous years. Despite taking the State Encouragement Prize for the Short Story in 1970, al-Shārūnī produced only three short stories that decade, the first of which was "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh".[3] Twelve years later, it lent its title to his fourth collection of short stories.

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[1] First published in *al-Majalla*, Cairo, July 1970. Reprinted in *al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh* (Cairo: Dār Mājid li'l-Ṭibā'a, 1982), pp. 5-16.

[2] First published in *al-'Arabī*, Kuwait, August 1995. Reprinted in *al-Daḥk Ḥatā al-Bukā'*, pp. 280-289.

[3] A fourth story, "al-Mīlād" ("The Nativity"), appeared in *al-'Arabī*, Kuwait, March 1979, pp. 64-67. "Al-Mīlād" is a rendition of the story of the nativity, told from the perspective of the stable-owner who gave shelter to Mary and Joseph. It has not been reprinted in any of al-Shārūnī's later collections, presumably because it is not a work of "original" fiction. We find this also with a later text, which is a re-rendering of the Omani folk-tale "al-Qabr wa'l-Qaṣr" ("The Tomb and the Palace"), and was published in *al-'Arabī*, Kuwait, September 1985, pp. 112-115.

Al-Shārūnī has not explained why his fictional output fell back to such an extent in the 1970s, and cites no personal or political reasons for this phenomenon.[4] His only suggestion is that he devoted most of this period to criticism, leading to the publication of four studies: *al-Riwāya al-Miṣriyya al-Mu'āṣira* (*The Contemporary Egyptian Novel*);[5] *al-Qiṣṣa al-Qaṣīra Naẓariyyan wa Taṭbīqiyyan* (*The Short Story in Theory and Practice*);[6] *al-Qiṣṣa wa'l-Mujtama'* (*The Story and Society*);[7] and *Namādhij min al-Riwāya al-Miṣriyya* (*Modes of the Egyptian Novel*),[8] for which he was awarded the State Encouragement Prize for Criticism in 1978. He also compiled and introduced two critical collections: *Saba'ūn Shama'a fī Ḥayāt Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī* (*Seventy Candles In the Life of Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī*)[9] and *al-Layla al-Thāniya Ba'd al-Alf* (*The One Thousand and Second Night*),[10] and published a translation of Ted Hughes' rendition of Seneca's *Oedipus*.[11] In 1979 al-Shārūnī was awarded the Second-Class Medal of the Republic, and in 1983 he left Egypt for Oman, where he spent the next ten years working for the Ministry of Information.

This last chapter analyses the following four stories: "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh"; "Shakwā al-Muwaẓẓaf al-Faṣīḥ" ("The Eloquent Functionary's Complaint");[12] "I'tirāfāt Ḍayyiq al-Khulq wa'l-Mathāna" ("Confessions of a Quick-Tempered, Weak Bladdered Man");[13] and "al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība li-Infiṣāl Ra's Mīm" ("The Strange

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[4] Indeed, when this point was raised with him, he expressed genuine surprise and puzzlement. Personal interview, 12 September 1998.

[5] Kitāb al-Hilāl (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1973).

[6] Kitāb al-Hilāl (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1977).

[7] Silsilat Kitābak (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1977).

[8] Mashrū' al-Maktaba al-'Arabiyya (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1977).

[9] Mashrū' al-Maktaba al-'Arabiyya (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-'Āmma li'l-Kitāb, 1975), being a collection of essays on the works of Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī.

[10] Mashrū' al-Maktaba al-'Arabiyya (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-'Āmma li'l-Kitāb, 1976), being a selection of short stories by Egyptian women writers.

[11] Sīnīka, *Ūdīb*, I'dād Ted Hughes, Silsilat al-Masraḥ al-'Ālamī (Kuwait: Wizārat al-I'lām bi'l-Kuwayt, 1976).

[12] First published in installments in *al-Ahrām*, Cairo, 6 December 1976, 23 January 1977 and 8 April 1977. Reprinted in *al-Majmū'āt*, vol. 2, pp. 296-330.

[13] First published in *al-'Arabī*, Kuwait, February 1981. Reprinted in *al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh*, pp. 47-65.

Events Surrounding the Detachment of Mīm's Head").[14] As usual, the stories are considered within their historical and socio-political contexts, and from the perspective of how they represent the changing perceptions of the self and the other.

The Eras of Sadat and Mubarak

In September 1970, Nasser died after the last of a series of heart attacks, his death compounding the mood of doubt and reflection prompted by the 1967 defeat. While most Egyptians expressed genuine grief at Nasser's death, it began to be recognised, with the benefit of hindsight, that certain aspects and ideals of his nationalist vision had failed. His successor was his vice-president, Anwar Sadat, who in 1971 launched his own "corrective revolution", and introduced a new permanent constitution. This reiterated a number of Nasserist principles, yet also brought with it distinctive changes: Islam was re-established as the state religion, while the political structure was re-oriented towards new national councils charged with the objective of furthering democracy. In short, this period witnessed a shift away from socialism and pan-Arabism towards more liberal political structures, plus the re-emergence of religion in the nation's political discourse. According to Chitham, it was with this shift that "Egypt was left without a socio-economic vision with which to gain a national consensus, and an ideological vacuum was created".[15] As a result, formerly-suppressed opposition groups were able to regain a foothold in political life, notably "Islamist" groups, the leaders of which Sadat had released from prison.

The shift from socialism towards liberalism also brought changes in Egypt's economic structures. Up to the time of Nasser's death, Egypt was still heavily dependent on agriculture, and little importance had been given to private capitalistic enterprise. With Sadat's new constitution, foreign capital (Arab and Western) was authorised, and the *infitāḥ* ("Open Door") policy was declared, which set about

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[14] First published in *al-'Arabī*, Kuwait, November 1993. Reprinted in *al-Ḍaḥk Ḥatā al-Bukā'*, pp. 5-24.

dissolving economic centralisation, and put economic and social development at the forefront of government policy. While there were many beneficiaries of the *infitāḥ*, leading to the blossoming of new social categories such as agents, middle-men and entrepreneurs, the vast majority of citizens suffered a worsening of their conditions, due to inflation, the cutting of subsidies and stockpiling.[16] By January 1977, this culminated in the so-called "revolution of the hungry",[17] a series of violent riots described as "the biggest upheaval since the rising against the British in 1919".[18] Rioters attacked police stations and government buildings, and lashed out at conspicuous wealth in all of its forms.

As regards foreign policy, one of Sadat's first moves was to diminish Egypt's relationship with the Soviet Union. In 1972 he ordered some 20,000 Soviet military personnel to leave Egypt, paving the way for an eventual *rapprochement* with Israel's ally, the United States. In the meantime, as Egypt remained in a war of attrition with Israel, Sadat continued to insinuate to the Egyptian people that they should prepare themselves for a "war of liberation". This came finally in October 1973, when Egypt crossed the Suez Canal and the so-called Bar Lev line, marking her first victory against Israel in the history of their conflict. This was followed by the re-establishing of diplomatic relations with the United States, and the re-opening of the Suez canal in 1975. With the United States now in the political frame, Sadat broke Egypt's Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union, and approved the establishment of three political groups within the ASU. The largest of these was his own group, the National Democratic Party (NDP), the other two being the Socialist Labour Party (including *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*) and the reconstituted New Wafd Party.

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[15] Chitham, op. cit., p. 107.
[16] Samir Hegazy, *Littérature et société en Égypte de la guerre de 1967 à celle de 1973* (Algiers: Enterprise Nationale de Livre, 1986), p. 61.
[17] Ibrahim et al, op. cit., p. 17.
[18] Hopwood, op. cit., p. 109.

Sadat's abandonment of Nasser's pan-Arab vision had a noticeable affect on Egypt's sense of national identity. As Vatikiotis claims, as a result of the success of the October War, Egyptians reverted to an earlier sense of national identity, which he calls "Egyptianism".[19] Thus, under Sadat, "it became acceptable for Egyptians [...] to claim an Egyptian political identity first and foremost", to the effect that now "their Arabism constitutes for them a cultural dimension of their political identity, not a necessary attribute of or prop for their national political being".[20] This attitude also came to be borne out on the regional level, when events such as the civil war in Lebanon and the Iran-Iraq war began to demonstrate the extent of ideological fragmentation with the Arab-Islamic world as a whole.

In November 1977, Sadat visited Jerusalem at the invitation of the Israeli prime minister, Menachem Begin. Within a year, the Camp David peace treaty had been signed, setting out Israel's withdrawal from all of the Egyptian territories it occupied. Although marking a historic stage in Egyptian-Israeli relations, Sadat's visit to Jerusalem met with hostility at home and abroad, as a result of which Egypt, "the old centre and leading Arab country of previous decades, was ostracized by most Arab countries and expelled from the Arab League".[21] Having already forfeited Soviet aid, by 1979 Egypt was also suffering the loss of badly-needed aid from its Arab neighbours. Yet, Sadat pressed ahead, and in 1980 diplomatic relations were established between Egypt and Israel. As Hopwood notes: "While still admired by the West, he [Sadat] was viewed with deepening indifference and hostility by his own people and he was hated by other Arabs."[22] By this time, charges of corruption, flagrant consumption and profiteering had also come to be levelled at Sadat and his supporters. In October 1981, Sadat was shot dead at a military parade marking the anniversary of Egypt's 1973 success against Israel. Responsibility was claimed by

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[19] Vatikiotis, op. cit., p. 499.
[20] Ibid., p. 500.
[21] Hafez, " The Transformation of Reality and the Arabic Novel's Aesthetic Response", p. 95.
[22] Hopwood, op. cit., p. 183

Jamā'at al-Jihād (The *Jihād* Group), over one hundred members of which had been arrested a year earlier and charged with forming an illegal anti-government party.[23] Sadat's death was welcomed in many quarters, while a generally cynical public seemed to distance itself from his passing — in marked contrast to their reaction to Nasser's death a decade before.

Sadat's successor was vice-president Hosni Mubarak, a Soviet-trained pilot who had not taken part in the Free Officer's coup. Shortly after taking office, he announced his intention to counter the influence of the so-called "*infitāḥ* mafia",[24] and spoke of "an *infitāḥ* of production rather than consumption, which would benefit all society and not the rich few".[25] Yet Mubarak continued with Sadat's policy of peace with Israel, and by 1982, Israel had begun to withdraw from Sinai and ambassadors were exchanged between the two states. Mubarak has since continued on a tentative, and more pragmatic, course of opening up party politics and allowing greater press and political freedoms. While Mubarak's style of leadership has been described as "low-key" and "businesslike",[26] the practice of identifying the Egyptian leader with the state and its policy continues.

In Egypt's intellectual and cultural life, a new spirit of criticism and enquiry emerged as a result of the Six-Day War. As we have seen, intellectuals were not able to instantly analyse the extent of its impact, due to a general sense of disorientation and controls put in place by the Nasserist regime. Thus it was not until after Nasser's death that frank and full critical analysis surfaced, appearing in the press, poetry and works of fiction. As Hegazy notes, there was "some violence in the differences of opinion"[27] at this time, particularly between Marxist and Islamist groups. The debate among

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[23] Ibid., p. 118.
[24] Nazih N. Ayubi, "Government and the State in Egypt Today", in Tripp and Owen (eds.), op. cit., p. 17.
[25] Hopwood, op. cit., p. 184.
[26] Ayubi, op. cit., p. 13.

Egypt's intellectuals and artists followed various courses, with the two major trends appearing to represent antithetical theoretical poles, although they were never wholly exclusive of each other. On the one hand, there were those who called for a return to traditionalism and the classical Arab heritage, while on the other, there were those who demanded a more aggressive pursuit of modernization. What both of these trends shared was the same ideological impetus, consisting in an activist or offensive, rather than a defensive, stance. Meanwhile, some intellectuals chose to leave Egypt, many in response to the political situation, and others in search of better employment opportunities, producing a "brain-drain" effect among Egypt's skilled and highly educated.

Perhaps one of the most significant trends to affect Egypt's political and cultural life during this period was religious, particularly Islamic, revivalism. Local factors which contributed to this included popular resentment at the *rapprochement* with Israel; the economic impact of the *infitāḥ*;[28] Sadat's gradual lifting of restrictions on the *Ikhwān*; and his foregrounding of Islam in the nation's political discourse, as we may see from the following:

> From the outset, Sadat called himself the 'believer president'. He began giving his speeches on the day of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad instead of the traditional Revolution Day speech, hence emphasizing religious identity, calling his era the age of 'science and religion'.[29]

At the same time, spells of sectarian strife began to surface in Egypt, beginning as early as 1972.[30] Aware of the polarisations emerging in society, Sadat called for a conference on the subject of national unity, followed by the passing of a law

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[27] Hegazy, op. cit., p. 69.

[28] It is recognised that socio-economic frustrations may go some way towards explaining the growing appeal of religious fraternities at this time, both Muslim and Christian.

[29] Ibrahim et al, op. cit., p. 17.

[30] Controversies included an outcry over Muslim conversions to Christianity and the circulation of a so-called "official" document, which claimed that Shenouda had threatened state security, and hinted at a patriarchal conspiracy.

announcing freedom of belief for all Egyptian citizens. Life imprisonment was also decreed for anyone found to be promoting sectarian strife.

After the October War there was a spell of relative calm, but anger at the prospect of the peace pact with Israel led Islamic groups to embark on a series of political uprisings, culminating in an attack on the Military Academy in 1974. Then, after Sadat ordered the preparation of draft laws based on the *sharī'a*, Coptic groups began their own campaigns. The next serious set of sectarian disturbances occurred between 1978 and 1981, in the midst of which came the Iranian revolution, which gave further impetus to Egyptian Islamist groups. As violent clashes erupted between Copts and Muslims, the Egyptian government's response was "to swing between the two groups with ill-considered acts of oppression and appeasement".[31] Thus, by 1981 (a year before the publication of al-Shārūnī's collection *al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh)*, sectarian strife in Egypt was at its peak. The country witnessed a series of deaths and injuries; journalists, politicians and religious activists were arrested; Pope Shenouda was dismissed and placed under house arrest; and, finally, Sadat was assassinated. Mubarak was later to allude to Sadat's death as a warning to Egypt, and spoke of the need for social justice to cure what he described as "the plague of religious extremism".[32] Nonetheless, Mubarak has not been able to stem the growth of radical religious groups in Egypt, where they remain a social and political force to be reckoned with.

1. "Al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh" ("The Mother and the Beast", 1970)

"Al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh" may be read as the simple tale of a mother's triumph over an unidentified wild beast, which attacks her sleeping son one day as she is washing her clothes in the river. Her heroic defence of her child, and her maiming of its ferocious assailant, mean that she becomes an object of wonder in her village, and eventually

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[31]Chitham, op. cit., p. 106.
[32] Hopwood, op. cit., p. 185.

acquires the status of village "legend". Al-Shārūnī argues, however, that beneath this superficially homely narrative lies an infinitely more complex ideological discourse. He also claims that "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh" is another of his "stories of prophecy", after "al-Ḥidhā'" and "Naẓariyya fi'l-Jilda al-Fāsida".[33] In it, he passes comment on the aftermath of the Six-Day War, and forecasts the success of Sadat's October War of 1973.

Following in the wake of the deeply obscure, psychological texts "al-Ziḥām" and "Lamaḥāt", "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh" marks a new narrative departure for al-Shārūnī. First, it has a pronounced "folk" element, supported by allusions to forms of popular literature, such as the tale, myth and legend. Second, according to Na'īm 'Aṭiyya, Umm Sayyid, the story's heroine, ushers in a new type of character construct,[34] which we may also identify here as a new form of narrative self. After the ego-centred paralysis of Fatḥī and Mawjūd, what is remarkable about the protagonist of this text is that, rather than being destroyed by fear, she confronts it and defends herself and, more importantly, her son. In line with al-Shārūnī's view that this is one of his "stories of prophecy", the emergence of this new, defiant narrative self will be considered from the perspective of Egypt's increasingly antagonistic relationship with Israel.

The Brief Appearance of a Combative Self

The individual narrative self in this text is its heroine, Umm Sayyid, a simple Egyptian peasant who translates collectively into the greater Egyptian citizenry. Her wholesome simplicity is reflected in her defining activities: caring for her child, carrying out household duties such as washing her clothes at the river, and going to market in

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[33] Personal interview, 12 September 1998.

[34] See his discussion of "the symbolic character" in *Yūsuf al-Shārūnī wa 'Ālamuh al-Qiṣaṣī* [*Yūsuf al-Shārūnī and His Narrative World*] (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-'Āmma li-Quṣūr al-Thaqāfa, 1994), pp. 95-98.

town. We learn from the text that she has little education, even to the extent of knowing little about her nation's own history, as we may see from the following:

> When she used to travel to the market in Luxor each Saturday, she would see on her way there the groups of tourists, with their red faces, hats, cameras and sunglasses, and the coloured clothes of their women which covered but little of the body. Tourists came there from far-away countries, because the Luxor of old had been known as Thebes, and the ancient kings of Egypt had once lived there. For fun, the guides would call out to her: "Nerfertiti! Nefertiti!" Once, one of them had invited her to stand before a tourist's camera, as they spoke gibberish together and signalled towards her with words from which she could only make out: "Nefertiti ... Nefertiti". On asking, she had learnt that Nefertiti was the beautiful wife of one of those ancient kings ... as ancient as this sycamore.[35]

Nonetheless, Umm Sayyid is blessed with nerve and common sense, and is supported by her strong sense of tradition and religious conviction. Unlike Fatḥī and Mawjūd, she inhabits a society where God is still a source of authority, and where faith is still a source of comfort and social guidance.[36]

In the course of her conflict with the beast, Umm Sayyid perceives herself initially as the defenceless victim of its wily aggressions. Yet, as the story demonstrates, she emerges as a figure of formidable and awesome strength; she does not resort to negativity or flight, but to a positive, physical, concrete act.[37] In this respect, she represents a new type of narrative self, whose entire spiritual, moral and philosophical outlook stands at odds with predecessors such as Fatḥī and Mawjūd. She is also unlike them in that she is successful in defending herself, while her true sense of selfhood is fully realised in the text, and her hidden self-potential is acknowledged and rewarded.

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[35] "Al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh", p. 8.

[36] References to religious practice in the text go back as far as the pharaonic period, to the time of the cult of Aten, recognised as the first monotheistic faith. Queen Nefertiti was wife of Akhnaten, who established this cult.

[37] 'Aṭiyya, op. cit., p. 96.

The emergence of this new phase in the dynamic narrative self is in many ways indicative of a shift in national sentiment. Written three years after the 1967 war, "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh" marks a time when Egyptians had begun to shake off their reluctance to discuss the war openly, and had begun to admit the extent of (and — to a certain degree — blame for) the tragedy. Thus, instead of persisting with the mood of national despair and dejection which followed the defeat, al-Shārūnī's uplifting tale of one woman's defence against a mighty assailant, presents a vision of an ideal for the national self. This is reinforced when we consider that the general critical consensus regarding this text is that Umm Sayyid is a symbol of the Egyptian mother-land, or nation.[38]

It may be argued that, in "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh", Egypt's historical and civic consciousness merge. We find numerous allusions to its Pharaonic heritage, designed to imbue the (national) reader with a sense of pride and psychological security, and to celebrate the greatness of Egypt's glorious and illustrious heritage. In the same way, the text alludes to popular or folk culture, expressing al-Shārūnī's desire to utilise indigenous forms of discourse, as a means of recreating and re-affirming Egypt's traditions and local identity. It is when we consider the narrative other that the ideological motivations behind this become more evident. The other is the beast, or the hidden enemy, waiting to launch its wickedness on the vulnerable narrative self. Thus, the self perceives the other as a predator and aggressor; it is a voracious, cunning monster and a treacherous, alien threat. It is defined by its strangeness, its ferocity and its greed, and by the silent, insidious means by which it launches its attack. If, as has been suggested, the narrative self in the text is Egypt, then it follows that the other is the enemy-state of Israel, victor in the 1967 war, and alien occupier of the Sinai peninsula.

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[38] Nādir al-Sibā'ī expands on this, claiming that the mother symbolises the nation; that the village symbolises the homeland; that the child symbolises the sons of the country; and that the beast symbolises the enemy. See "al-Ḥiwār al-Maftūḥ Bayn al-Qāri' wa'l-Naṣṣ ... wa Qiṣaṣ Yūsuf al-Shārūni" ("The Open Dialogue between Reader and Text and the Stories of Yūsuf al-Shārūnī"), in

Extensions of this other are the foreign tourists in Luxor, who, it may be argued, represent Israel's Western supporters. They too are perceived by the self as "alien", as we may see from Umm Sayyid's observations of their behaviour, their language, skin colour, clothes and so on. Like the beast, they are voracious in their desire to consume the local history and heritage, while the bold exhibitionism of their half-dressed women is construed as an assault on local mores and traditional sensibilities. Besides the cultural dimension, the main element of difference between the narrative self and the other is spiritual-cum-moral; as the text demonstrates, in spite of being physically weaker, the battle ends with the self gaining ascendancy over the other, since it is Umm Sayyid's faith and superior moral fibre which lead her to victory.

Tales, Myths, Legends and Anti-Colonial Discourse

"Al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh" is an example of anticolonial cultural nationalism, in that it finds narrative authenticity in the lower classes and folk traditions. It also makes contrapuntal use of the narrative practices of its subject group, that is, predominantly oral forms such as tales, legends, myths and popular sayings. Of these, tales and stories are most central to the text, with many references to *ḥikāyāt*,[39] *riwāyāt* or *qiṣaṣ*,[40] and numerous occurrences of the verb *rawā* (to tell or narrate). These narrative forms span a variety of functions, from the exchange of advice or points of popular wisdom, to entertaining anecdotes, or tales of an educational, fantastic or enlightening nature.[41] Consider these examples from the text:

Faraj, op. cit., pp. 267-271.

[39] *Ḥikāya* (pl. *ḥikāyāt*) can mean "tale, narrative, story, legend" (see Ch. Pellat, "Ḥikāya", *EI*^{2}, pp. 367-372). Some narrow the term down to mean a "popular tale or folktale", suggesting a social distinction between the "high culture" of *adab* literature, for example, and the "popular culture" of *ḥikāyāt*.

[40] Both *riwāya* (pl. *riwāyāt*) and *qiṣṣa* (pl. *qiṣaṣ*) are used here as synonyms for *ḥikāya*, and should not be understood in the modern-day context of the novel and (short) story forms.

[41] The *ḥikāya* embraces a number of narrative forms which are relevant here, such as the *khabar* (most often signifying a historical or biographical narrative, but also referring to colloquial, often comic stories); the *nādira* (being interesting reports, anecdotes and witticisms); the *fā'ida* (a remark of interest or useful advice; occasionally a story); and the *khurāfa* (a fabulous story, such as a fairy tale or superstition). See Pellat, op. cit., pp. 367-372.

> It was like a huge dog. It was a wolf, perhaps, or a hyena. She had never seen either before, though she had heard many stories about them from the people in the village. Had she been alone she would have jumped into the water, for among the things she had heard was that these animals do not risk entering into battle with their prey in water. But she could not leave her son Sayyid to be eaten by the beast.[42]

> It must be a hyena, she said to herself. For the people in the village say that the hyena has two spikes on its neck, one on each side, so it cannot turn its head to the right or the left, and when it runs, it runs in a straight line.[43]
> Fāṭima, Shaykh 'Abd al-Dāyim's daughter, told her that her father was coming back on his donkey along the cemetery road one night, when a hyena confronted him. The donkey stood still as though pinned to the ground, pricked up its ears, then opened up its hind legs and urinated. He and his donkey had been able to take cover in one of the tombs all night, until at dawn the beast gave up hope and left. When he emerged from his hiding place, he saw with his own eyes — in the clear light of day — that the donkey had urinated blood.[44]

> This truce permitted her to wrap two of her husband's robes around her left hand, over her palm and wrist and round her upper arm, both as protection for herself and as a new form of weapon, the like of which she had heard about from stories told in the village.[45]

> When the doctors allowed her to have visitors, dozens of villagers rushed to listen dozens of times to her tale.[46]

While "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh" does not submit to the rigorous model of the folktale as proposed by Propp,[47] the text nonetheless contains elements of the tale in its various forms. Indeed, we might even say that the story of Umm Sayyid's conflict with the beast may be classified as either an interesting report or anecdote; an edifying tale;[48] or a fabulous story, rather in the manner of a fairy tale. Certainly, the "magical" aspects of the fairy tale are evident:

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[42] "Al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh", p. 6.

[43] Ibid., p. 9.

[44] Ibid., pp. 9-10. Note how even Shaykh 'Abd al-Dāyim fails to display the bravery of Umm Sayyid, and flees his assailant.

[45] Ibid., p. 12.

[46] Ibid., p. 15.

[47] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

[48] The narrator notes how the example of Umm Sayyid's bravery has been handed down to the next generation: "Whenever she visits one of the houses in the village, the grown-ups are keen for the little ones to see these [amputated] fingers for themselves, as proof of what they had told them before about the story of her battle and her victory over the beast." "Al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh", p. 16.

> Perhaps it was an *'ifrīt*,[49] like the one which appeared before Marmar in the butchers' yard, as she was on her way one night from her aunt's house in the east of the village to her own house in the west. But that had not been like the beast before her [now] — it had been a donkey that had turned into a goat-kid, with legs that grew so long that it had almost touched the meat hooks, and as soon as she had recited the *fātiḥa,*[50] it had vanished.[51]

As the narrator tells us, with the passing of time, the details of Umm Sayyid's battle with the beast begin to take on the characteristics of yet another genre: the legend. The text explains how this process came about:

> This story had been confirmed by more than one witness — the *'umda* of our village and his security guard among them — though as much or little detail was added as was in keeping with the storyteller's nature. Thus it came to be added to the legends and *mawwāl*s of our village.[52]

According to André Jolles, the legend, like the edifying tale, is essentially a response to man's desire for ideals of conduct; ideals which are "nonetheless imitable, approachable, perhaps even attainable by other humans".[53] Thus the villagers create the "legend" of Umm Sayyid, since it is through her that they can concretise their aspirations, be they local or national, and bring to light the values which underpin them.

Elements of the legend are embedded in the text itself, in fact 'Alā' al-Dīb contends that "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh" is a re-working of the legend of St. George and the Dragon.[54] St. George (revered by the Copts as Mār Jiryis/Jirjis, and commonly associated with al-Khidr in Islam), is the archetypal avatar who protects the upright and defends them from injustice. In the original legend, St. George slays a voracious dragon so that his fellow citizens can regain access to the waters of the city fountain,

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[49] A demon.

[50] The opening chapter of the *Qur'ān*.

[51] "Al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh", p. 6.

[52] Ibid., p. 16. A *mawwāl* (pl. *mawāwīl*) is a poem in the colloquial language, often set to music.

[53] Robert Scholes, in his summary of Jolles' *Einfache Formen* ("simple forms") in *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 44-48.

[54] 'Alā' al-Dīb, "'Āshiq al-Qiṣṣa al-Qaṣīra" ("The Lover of the Short Story"), in Faraj, op. cit., p.

and is generally read as an allegory for the triumph of the Christian hero (Christ, St. John among others) over evil (Satan). In "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh", we find a number of parallels with the original legend, which, when considered in the light of the 1967 war and the subsequent Israeli occupation of Sinai, reveal how the text may be read not only as a tale, but as an allegory for this conflict and its eventual resolution. Let us first consider the parallels between the two stories:

Legend of St. George and the Dragon	*"Al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh"*
Location of conflict: outside city walls	Location of conflict: outside village
Protagonist: St. George	Protagonist: Umm Sayyid
Antagonist: Dragon	Antagonist: Beast
Water motif: Fountain / spring	Water motif: River
Pharmakos: King's daughter	*Pharmakos*: Sayyid
Dragon slain by spear between eyes	Beast driven away by branch between eyes

Now let us see how elements of the original legend may be decoded in allegorical terms:

Legend of St. George and the Dragon	*"Al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh"*
St. George as saviour	Umm Sayyid as hero / legend
Old, feeble king	Politically, militarially weakened leadership
Incurable illness or wound of king	Symbolic castration of Nasser's power
Dragon guards hoard / treasure	Beast (Israel) guards hoard / treasure (Sinai)
Dragon demands sacrificial victims	Beast (Israel) demands Sayyid (son of Egypt) as sacrificial victim
Dragon slain; wasteland restored to life	Beast driven away; Sinai restored to Egypt[55]
Confirmation of faith	Confirmation of Egypt's ability to liberate its land

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Another characteristic of Umm Sayyid's story which has structural parallels with the legend is its adventure element, or what Frye calls the "quest".[56] This quest consists of four stages: the preliminary minor adventure or *agon* (conflict); the crucial struggle, or *pathos* (death-struggle); the disappearance of the hero, often linked to the concept of *sparagmos* (mutilation or physical handicap); then the exaltation of the hero, or *anagnorisis* (discovery, recognition of hero).[57] Using this paradigm, we may analyse Umm Sayyid's quest as follows: (i) *agon*: Umm Sayyid's first skirmish with the beast, in which she throws a stone into its face and lifts her child to safety into the tree; (ii) *pathos*: Umm Sayyid's definitive battle with the beast, following her child's fall from the tree. She thrusts her left hand down the beast's throat and, with her right hand, spears him between the eyes with a branch;[58] (iii) disappearance and *sparagmos*: Umm Sayyid's story is at first doubted by some of the villagers. She goes into hospital for three months, where three of her mutilated fingers are amputated;[59] and (iv) *anagnorisis*: investigations continue into Umm Sayyid's account of events, and corroborating evidence emerges. Her story is acknowledged to be true and she is recognised for her heroism.

While the intertextual echoes of the legend of St. George lend attributes to Umm Sayyid which seem at times to be super-human, she is only ever superior "in degree" to other people, and does not possess miraculous or magical powers, as we find with the heroes of myths, for example.[60] Yet the text also contains archetypal mythic elements, such as Umm Sayyid's conflict with the beast, parallels of which may be

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[55] Could the driving of Israel out of Sinai be an ironic/inverted take on the Biblical exodus, by which it is the Egyptians who are delivered from bondage?

[56] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 192.

[57] Ibid., p. 92.

[58] The one-eyed beast may be interpreted here as a symbol for one-eyed Moshe Dayan, Israeli Minister of Defence.

[59] Umm Sayyid's ravaged hand is also symbolically meaningful: since the hand is a signifier of control, strength and possession, the loss of her three fingers may be seen to represent Egypt's loss of Sinai.

[60] This is adapted from Frye's discussion of the mythical mode, to which the abovementioned attributes of the protagonist are pivotal.

found in myths going back as far as Canaanite and Babylonian literature. We might even suggest that it is a reworking of Christ's slaying of the Biblical Leviathan, within which context, Umm Sayyid's victory over the beast becomes an act of national redemption, and symbolises the conquest of the Promised Land (Sinai) and the raising of Eden (a new Egypt) in the wilderness (the Arab world).

In structural terms, the text also contains many of the cyclical patterns of myth, particularly its references to the death and rebirth (daily passage) of the sun-god Aten.[61] Other examples include the text's many binaristic references to archetypal human experience:

Good → *hero* → *Mother* → *Christ*	Evil → *villain* → *Beast* → *Satan*
Birth	Death
Childhood	Old age
Defence (of the self)	Aggression (of the other)
Waking	Sleeping
Light	Darkness
Innocence	Experience
Order	Chaos

In stylistic terms, it may be argued that "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh" shows less experimentalism than earlier texts; certainly it is simpler and less self-consciously avant-garde. Yet it would be more accurate to speak of a stylistic "development" here, rather than a radical breaking with earlier norms, for it continues with certain characteristic modes of expression, such as symbolism and the retreat into the psychological self. The most obvious development is the text's popular or folk ethos, which also informs the author's choice of narrative subject group and location: rather

[61] As the narrator says: "Behind her was the solar disc Aten: red, dying out, and sinking towards its setting place." "Al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh", p. 7. The repeated image of the setting sun evokes a sense of

than basing the story in a modern, urban society (as al-Shārūnī usually does), the author locates the text in the (then) rural, pre-modern village of Karnak, in the district of Luxor, Upper Egypt. In this way, he makes a rare presentation of the customs, rituals, values and belief systems shaping a traditional Egyptian community.

"Al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh" also moves away from earlier, recurring themes such as madness, crime, punishment, imprisonment, and so on. As we have seen, the protagonist of the text has transformed: here, the negativity of earlier anti-heroes, such as the inward-looking, egocentric Mawjūd, is exchanged for the positivity of our outward-looking, family-oriented heroine, Umm Sayyid. What is more, in direct contrast to earlier mother figures, such as Fatḥī's stepmother 'Awāṭif and Mawjūd's lover, Shaykha Madīḥa, Umm Sayyid introduces a new, caring, responsible mother figure, who thinks nothing of putting the welfare of her child before her own.

There is some experimentalism in the structure of the text, which is divided into two sections, and may be described in photographic terms as a "close-up" and a "distant shot". The former starts *in media res*, and gives a detailed account of the confrontation, while the latter contextualises it in its social and historical setting. Besides moderating the pace of the narrative action, this device also supports the narrative's oral dimension, since it enhances our impression of Umm Sayyid's story being related by the narrator before an actual audience. A second effect of this textual rupture is to emphasise the transition between two periods in time: in the "close-up" section Umm Sayyid is shown as a young mother, while in the second section she is an elderly widow and the subject of a legend handed down to the next generation. This shift from the young to the old and vice versa, with the non-mechanised village and its old sycamore tree on the one hand, and hints of cultural and technological change on the other, serves to remind us of the significance and merits of bygone values. The following table demonstrates how past and present are juxtaposed:

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the passing of time, and of the old order changing and yielding to a new one. The backdrop of the

"Old days" → *ancient Egypt* → *time of interior story*	Present day → *modern-day Egypt* → *time of frame story*
Umm Sayyid as child / young mother	Umm Sayyid as elderly widow
Nefertiti, ancient queen	Umm Sayyid, village legend
West Bank of Nile: world of dead	East Bank of Nile: world of living
Premodern village: ancient sycamore	Modern village: new bridge
Popular narrative forms: e.g. folktale	Modern narrative forms: e.g. short story

As an allegory for the conflict between Egypt and Israel, "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh" is a nationalist, committed discourse, and is firmly ethical in orientation. Rather than pinning a future victory on the regime, however, it professes faith in the potential of the average Egyptian citizen; thus it creates a national hero out of a simple character such as Umm Sayyid. Once again, al-Shārūnī takes up the common theme of the "purity" of village life, and in some ways presents a rather romantic view of the countryside, foregrounding its moral superiority over the metropolis. A sense of solidarity with the citizens of the nation is strengthened by the narrator, who, though he plays no active role in Umm Sayyid's story, is keen to identify her with the group ("our village"), and to claim her as an example of local steadfastness and virtue.

A last point concerns the text's psychological dimension, which is less pronounced than in earlier stories, but which features nonetheless. The text flashes back at various junctures to Umm Sayyid's childhood dreams, thereby exposing the source of her darkest and most deep-seated fears. By confronting the beast as she does, she succeeds in overcoming the nightmares of her youth, emerging stronger and, above all, liberated as a result. By analogy, the author appeals to the Egyptian nation to put its own fears aside, and to confront the beast that lurks within and without the self.

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temples of Luxor affirms both the greatness of Egypt's past, and the promise of future greatness.

2. "Shakwā al-Muwaẓẓaf al-Faṣīḥ" ("The Eloquent Functionary's Complaint"), 1976-77

"Shakwā al-Muwaẓẓaf al-Faṣīḥ"[62] first appeared as a three-part series in the newspaper *al-Ahrām*, and was published between December 1976 and April 1977. The text consists of five separately-titled sections: "Shakwā al-Muwaẓẓaf al-Faṣīḥ" ("The Eloquent Functionary's Complaint"); "Marthiya" ("Elegy"); "Īḍāḥ" ("Clarification"); "Du'ā'" ("Invocation"); and "Risāla 'Ājila min al-'Ālam al-Ākhar" ("An Urgent Letter from the Afterlife"). Its title is an intertextual allusion to the Pharaonic tale "al-Fallāḥ al-Faṣīḥ" ("The Eloquent Peasant"), which dates back over four thousand years to the time of the Tenth Dynasty, during the Middle Kingdom.[63] Like its ancient predecessor, "Shakwā" details one man's fight against a distant and arrogant leadership, and is also an appeal for social justice. More specifically, it discusses the relationship of Sadat's liberal experiment to the moral and physical breakdown of Egyptian society in the late 1970s.

"Shakwā" contains two narrative voices, the first of which belongs to the frame narrator. The frame narrator (a writer) is introduced to us in a preamble, in which he explains how he came to be in possession of a bundle of letters, written by a relative who recently died.[64] This relative, Zayd bin 'Ubayd, is the second, and predominant, voice in the text. A minor functionary,[65] Zayd bin 'Ubayd had devoted his life to literature and the crafting of complaints, in which he expounded on the falling standards of life in modern Egypt; the degradation of its public services; the inefficiencies and idiosyncrasies of its bureaucratic system; the breakdown of morals

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[62] Hereafter cited as "Shakwā".

[63] For an English translation, see "The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant", trans. R. O. Faulkner, in William Kelly Simpson (ed.), *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, and Poetry*, new ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 31-49.

[64] Such preambles were a feature of the short stories of the 1920s and 1930s, such as those written by Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Lāshīn (1894-1954) and Maḥmūd Taymūr.

[65] The word *muwaẓẓaf* can mean "employee", "official", "civil servant" or "functionary". Since most activities in Egypt were nationalised or government-run at this time, we can assume here that it refers to a "civil servant" or "functionary".

and the growth in corruption and crime; and the negligence and sloppiness infecting civic life at all levels.[66] As the frame narrator explains:

> I found myself before dozens of complaints which my relative had written on a range of highly diverse subjects; some touched on very general issues, while others touched on matters particular to his family, relatives or friends. They were also addressed to various sides, from the head of a primary school or the manager of a post office, to presidents and prime ministers of Arab and foreign states — and even to God, may He be praised and exalted.[67]

After his preamble, we hear no more from the frame narrator, since his role is to establish the history and background of the subject of the text. Besides this, he presents the reader with a selection of Zayd bin 'Ubayd's complaints (eight in total), which he claims to have proof-read and edited slightly. As he explains, these are merely samples from a choice of some ninety letters,[68] covering a variety of themes and topics, and addressed to a range of (prospective) recipients. He also describes how the complaints are rendered in a selection of styles and forms: some are formal and eloquent, while others are parodies of or allude to genres such as the elegy or the Islamic *du'ā'* (prayer of invocation). Others still are relatively informal and unadorned, or — as the narrator claims — "ordinary, or perhaps less than ordinary".[69]

What is most curious about these letters is that, in spite of their number, they were never actually sent. Why Zayd bin 'Ubayd chose to draft and keep, rather than post, the letters is never fully explained, though the frame narrator suggests some possible explanations:

> I believe that if it was fear which stopped him from sending some of them — particularly those addressed to high-ranking officials — then perhaps his reason for not sending the majority of them was that he was convinced that it would make no difference whether he posted them or not. He must have read thousands of similar complaints in the papers which met with no response,

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[66] In this way, the text is a descendent of "Naẓariyya ", which addresses similar issues.

[67] "Shakwā", p. 297.

[68] By contrast, the eloquent peasant wrote only nine complaints. This may be taken as an indication of the enormous range of Zayd bin 'Ubayd's grievances.

[69] "Shakwā", p. 299.

> and which seemed to him (as he stated in one of his letters) a means of "letting off steam", rather than of getting things done. Perhaps he saw how some of these complaints can work against those who send them, and who find their affairs completely stymied (as happened to his daughter-in-law, a teacher at the Ministry of Education), or their suggestions blocked, as a punishment, when all they had been angry about was badly-conducted or tardy work.[70]

This argument is also borne out by Zayd bin 'Ubayd himself. In a passage taken from his last complaint, a poem rendered in free verse entitled "Ilā al-Qarn al-Ḥādī wa'l-'Ashrīn" ("To the Twenty-First Century"), he writes:

> I wrote a complaint.
> I was told: Write a thousand,
> You are only one, while we are ninety-nine.
> You are an individual, while we are in our millions.
>
> You are a number in our records.
> Does it matter whether you come, does it matter whether you go?
> You are an ephemeral individual, while we, the group, remain.
> We were [here] before you, and after you we will stay.[71]

The Other and the Break-Up of Civil Society

In "Shakwā", the battle lines are once again drawn between the struggling, aspirant, frustrated individual and the dominant, self-serving, exclusivist group. What is noticeable, however, is that for the first time the gulf between the two appears to be closing, due mostly to socio-economic transformations. The narrative self is Zayd bin 'Ubayd, a reworking of al-Shārūnī's archetypal, alienated, *petit-bourgeois* protagonist. As ever, he is a man of middle-class standards and values, and a small-time devotee of learning and letters. A cultivated, hard-working, upright citizen, his occasionally moralising tone is tempered by a tendency to modesty and good-natured irony. His attitude to life and his sense of civic duty are best expressed in one of his own lines: "I do not like to complain, for I believe in the principle of personal effort",[72] a doctrine he repeats at various points in his complaints.

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[70] Ibid., pp. 297-298.
[71] Ibid., p. 329.
[72] Ibid., p. 307.

As usual, Zayd bin 'Ubayd speaks not only for himself as an individual, but on behalf of his socio-economic group in particular and, on occasions, the Egyptian people as a whole. With the ambition characteristic of his class, he feels cheated by the ways in which society has held him back, and feels thwarted and unable to achieve his true potential. The socio-economic limitations he is placed under are thrown further into relief by the rapid changes occurring around him, which appear to owe more to corruption and nepotism than to hard, honest work and individual merit. Yet Zayd bin 'Ubayd is also a reticent and fearing self and, unlike his brave, dynamic predecessor Umm Sayyid, he lacks the instinct to challenge or confront his aggressors.[73]

The text contains numerous others, namely the persons or institutions to whom Zayd bin 'Ubayd's complaints are addressed. Collectively, these officials, ministers and administrative bodies are used as symbols, or forms of synecdoche, to speak of the regime or state hegemony as a whole. The self's perceptions of the other are almost entirely negative: it is negligent, complacent, arrogant and materialistic; its society is downtrodden and dissolving into anarchy; its centre of power, Cairo, is degraded, shabby and filthy. In Zayd bin 'Ubayd's view, the other is the very reason for the break-up of civil society: spiritual and moral values, formerly seen as fortifying and unifying, are demeaned in a climate of unchecked opportunism; the belief in the common good has fallen victim to the ego and the fight for material gain; and the reckless rush towards modernisation has led to the de-skilling of the individual, class conflicts and the dehumanisation of social relations.

Above all, the self perceives the other as god-like and remote, its distance emphasised by the fact that Zayd bin 'Ubayd's letters are never sent, and thus no attempt at dialogue is ever really established. While the other is always associated with power, this power appears often to be faded or tainted: in one complaint Cairo (the seat

[73] Thus this is a narrative founded on cerebral, rather than physical, action. Like the pre-Islamic prophetess Zarqā' al-Yamāma, Zayd bin 'Ubayd suffers from that predicament particular to the Arab

of power) is personified as a defiled, degraded wretch, while in another the Inland Revenue department (an agent of power) is a painted, perfumed coquette, who is unjust to her lovers, abusing and tormenting them. Through his complaints, the self sets out to destroy the "mystique" of the other, and to expose the tawdriness and ugliness behind its glossy facade.

For the greater part, the self remains an individual entity. Other selves, combined in the national collectivity, merely represent an extension of the other, since they accept, and even connive in, the social imbalances and inequalities the other promotes. It is clear from Zayd bin 'Ubayd's analysis that civil society under Sadat's regime shows no more — and possibly even less — cohesion than under Nasser's. Instead, the self has been subsumed within a massive market-system, at the top of which sit Egypt's president and his associates. As Zayd bin 'Ubayd observes:

> The individual has become cheap in the market of the collectivity;
> He was eaten by the dragon of the collectivity.[74]

For the self, however, life remains a battle to survive. As a cog in the machine of the project of *infitāḥ*, it becomes absorbed into the other out of economic necessity, or in an attempt to gain a stake in the means of production. This makes for what Zayd bin 'Ubayd describes as a "collectivity of individuals":[75]

> We are the collectivity, sitting behind the desk,
> We are the closed doors.
> We are the committees behind the closed doors,
> We are the visible invisible, the palpably abstract.
> We are a collectivity of individuals,
> But the collectivity in us crushes the individual among us.
> We are the machine,
> We are its keys and its buttons.[76]

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intellectual of seeing "too much" (i.e. for his own good).

[74] "Shakwā", p. 328.

[75] Ibid., p. 329.

[76] Ibid., pp. 329-330.

Zayd bin 'Ubayd is a self along the lines of Ṣāliḥ in "Naẓariyya", since he sees problems in society yet fails to articulate them openly, and so nothing is ever done to solve these problems. Like Ṣāliḥ, he also expresses dismay that the self and the other cannot co-operate for the sake of their mutual benefit, proclaiming:

> O God, teach us [to understand] that the welfare of the individual flourishes only through the welfare of the collectivity, and that the welfare of the collectivity flourishes only through the welfare of the individual;[77]

and:

> I am dreaming ...
> Dreaming of an age when the individual and the collectivity are reconciled.[78]

In Zayd bin 'Ubayd's view, this national phenomenon of a "collectivity of individuals" is but the latest stage in a historical continuum, which has passed from feudalism, through socialism, and now to capitalism. As he declares:

> I am the crushed individual in the twentieth century.
> In the nineteenth century, the individual crushed the collectivity.
> In the twentieth century, the collectivity crushed the individual.
> I am the crushed, the bruised, the ground down, the pulverised.[79]

His sense of crushed isolation also stems from his lack of political agency, especially when considered against the dynamic economic activity of the period. In this respect, he represents Egypt's *petite bourgeoisie* as a whole, to whom Sadat promised a share of political power, but who lost out to concessions to others, becoming profoundly alienated from the state and its leadership as a consequence.

Form, Content and a Narrative of Ideas

"Shakwā" is structurally and stylistically experimental, and is al-Shārūnī's first example of a thematically unifying frame-text containing a series of stylistically and

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[77] Ibid., p. 318.
[78] Ibid., p. 330.
[79] Ibid., p. 328.

topically discrete sections.[80] The text has little narrative development: while the author commonly foregrounds character exposition over narrative action, the text does not contain the requisite complication, climax or *dénouement* of the traditional plot paradigm; nor does it contain any reversal or transformation. Also contributing to its sense of plotlessness is the fact that its formal arrangement is such that the reader gains no real sense of temporality or cause and effect. Then there is the physical fragmentation of the text, reinforced by its allusions to different texts and genres, which also prohibit, or at least limit, its dramatic potential.

There is a clear link between the form and the content of this text: the lack of narrative development, and the tension between the text's disparate sections, express the stasis and social stagnation experienced by the self. Meanwhile, the unfulfilled action presented by the form is echoed in the content of Zayd bin 'Ubayd's complaints, which detail a series of stymied or thwarted endeavours.[81] Finally, the fact that these complaints are never sent to their addressees is yet another example of unfulfilled action, since the problems they claim to raise fall on deaf ears, and are ultimately never resolved.[82]

There is also some experimentalism in the author's choice of subject matter. While much of the text addresses real social issues, the final section, "Risāla 'Ājila min al-'Ālam al-Ākhar", sees the frame narrator visiting a spiritualist. As he explains matter-of-factly to the reader: "I was surprised to see Zayd bin 'Ubayd's soul present at the

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[80] This should not be confused with his "Qiṣaṣ fī Daqā'iq", op. cit., being "mini collections" of stories, organised under a common theme or title. It should also be mentioned that, while "Shakwā" was published in serial form, this has no bearing on its structure; al-Shārūnī confirms that the text was written and completed *before* it was published, and was not written in separate installments for serialisation.

[81] What is striking from his complaints is how even the most mundane (individual or collective) projects are never able to come to fruition. He gives the example of the public transport system: due to its haphazard organisation and unreliability, we find commuters who never reach their workplace, young lovers who never make their dates at the cinema, and students who never get to their exams. Instead, they are all left standing on the platform, as the system appears to collapse about them.

session, dictating the following letter to the medium, and asking me to publish it along with all with the others."[83] For a moment, the introduction of the marvellous into what is otherwise a realistic frame text, casts doubt on the authority of the frame narrator, of whose sound sense of judgement the reader has until now been relatively confident. On the other hand, this quirk remains in keeping with the narrative's tone of humour and irony, and has the cautionary effect of reminding the reader that, in spite of its overtly ideological discourse, this is an artistic construct before all else.

In terms of style, the text is distinguished by its sporadic attention to rhetorical tropes and figures, revealing an intertextual dialogue with the language used in the eloquent peasant's complaint. It should be stressed, however, that the text contains no systematic rhetorical scheme, with incidences of rhetorical style appearing randomly, if not erratically. Indeed, while Zayd bin 'Ubayd appears to aspire to a complex, poetic writing style, he is only occasionally successful, and our expectations of eloquence tend to meet with an informal, rather everyday style. What this betrays is his self-conscious attempts to present himself as a man of learning to his addressees, and to condition his discourse to their (perceived) elevated status and refined sensibilities. On the other hand, it may be argued that he uses tropic features ironically, signifying his contempt for, and his repressed desire to condemn or challenge, these individuals.

As well as attempting to parody the eloquent peasant, Zayd bin 'Ubayd appears to pepper his complaints with certain characteristics of classical Arabic prose. Among the devices we find are *saj'* (rhymed prose), echoes of which may even be found in his name, Zayd bin 'Ubayd. *Saj'* is evident in phrases such as *man alladhī akhraja am'ā'aki, wa nathara ashlā'aki?* ("Who is he who tore your insides out, and

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[82] This is in ironic contrast to the eloquent peasant, whose problems were resolved without him even being aware of it: the Pharaoh so enjoyed listening to his eloquent petitions that he instructed his steward to make provision for the peasant, but without telling him that he had done so.

[83] "Shakwā", pp. 320-321. The fact that Zayd bin 'Ubayd complains even in the afterlife is also an indication of the extent of his frustration!

scattered your severed limbs around?"),[84] or *ayna jamāluki wa zīnatuki, wa 'abaquki wa khuḍratuki, wa hudū'uki wa naẓāfatuki?* ("Where is your beauty and finery, your redolent fragrance and greenness, your calmness and your cleanness?"), where the possessive pronoun is used repeatedly.[85] In other instances, *saj'* occurs in expressions borrowed from Islamic discourse, such as: *waqāka allāhu sharr al-asrār, innahu al-ḥalīm al-ghaffār, wa'l-'alīm al-sattār* ("May God preserve you from the evil of secrets; He is the Clement and Forgiving, the Omniscient and Protecting").[86]

Generally speaking, however, Zayd bin 'Ubayd tends to favour less artistically demanding techniques than *saj'*, such as syntactical and lexical repetition. Besides lending elegance to the text, these also give structure to the discourse, as we find in his complaint to the Minister of Transport, where he introduces several consecutive paragraphs with the discourse linker: "I will not tell you about ...",[87] and then proceeds to rail about dirty train carriages, pick-pocketing, broken train windows and so on. The effect of this is indisputably ironic; by announcing that he is *not* going to tell the addressee about the topic in question (and then proceeding to do so), he gives it emphasis. Similarly, in his letter to the Minister of Education he repeats several times that he wishes to get "straight to the heart of the matter",[88] yet goes on to waffle expansively about the topic under discussion (being his daughter-in-law's prospects of being awarded a promotion). In other cases, repetition is largely referential, as when he repeats key lexical motifs (generally for ideological emphasis), such as the binarisms "justice and injustice" and "logical and absurd".[89] In others still the effect is emphatic, but mostly decorative, as in the following examples of parallelism: "We talk about you but do not see you, and if we see you we cannot get hold of you, and even

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[84] Ibid., p. 300.
[85] Ibid., p. 300.
[86] Ibid., p. 307.
[87] Ibid., pp. 304-305. In the notes to "The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant", the translator states that a series of paragraphs beginning with the same word or phrase was "a regular Egyptian literary device", op. cit., p. 40.
[88] Ibid., pp. 313-315.

if we get hold of you, you escape us";[90] and "he who falls, falls, and he who breaks a bone, breaks a bone".[91]

Other tropic features include similes and metaphors, as in: "I will not tell you about the [train] doors — sisters of the windows — half-closed, like the eyes of the wicked";[92] and: "Be, Your Excellency, like the fullness that ends hunger, like the garments that end nakedness, like the clear sky after the storm which brings warmth to those who feel cold. Be like the fire which cooks things, like the water which quenches thirst."[93] Metaphor is also used to provoke a moral or ethical response, as in the following:

> For how can a man cross the river if the boat is taken out of the water? Is it good to cross the river by foot? A crack has appeared in the dam and the water is pouring through it, giving reason for me to complain. The wheat measure has become full, and whenever it is shaken surplus grains fall to the ground. For he who is unjust to another is like one who strangles him.[94]

Antithesis is also prominent, as we find in repeated references to "the cold of the winter and the heat and dust of summer",[95] "the idea and the implementation",[96] and "the interests of the individual and the interests of the collectivity".[97]

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[89] Ibid., p. 316; p. 315.
[90] Ibid., p. 308.
[91] Ibid., p. 303.
[92] Ibid., p. 305.
[93] Ibid., p. 317. This alludes directly to the eloquent peasant's fifth complaint, which reads: "O High Steward my lord! [...] Foster all good and destroy evil, even as satiety comes and ends hunger; (as) clothing (comes) and ends nakedness; even as the sky becomes serene after / a high wind and warms all who are cold; like a fire which cooks what is raw and like water which quenches thirst." "The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant", op. cit., pp. 43-44.
[94] "Shakwā", p. 317. This parodies parts of the eloquent peasant's fourth, seventh and eighth complaints. The fourth complaint reads: "Is the ferryboat brought to land? How then can one cross? [...] Crossing / the river upon sandals, is (that) a good (way of) crossing?", ibid, p. 42; the seventh complaint reads: "It was a breach in the dam, and its water flowed; my mouth opened to speak", ibid., p. 45; and the eighth complaint reads: "The cornmeasure overflows, and when it runs over, / its surplus is lost on the ground", ibid., p. 46.
[95] "Shakwā", pp. 304-305.
[96] Ibid., p. 309.
[97] Ibid., p. 309.

A feature particular to the classical Arabic epistle lies in Zayd bin 'Ubayd's use of formulæ, as we find in his letter to the Minister of Transport. Traditionally, the classical epistle opens with the *basmala* (the invocation: "In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful"), while Zayd bin 'Ubayd's complaint opens as follows:

> In the name of the thousands of struggling, tax-paying employees, and in the name of their sons and daughters, who study in the universities and secondary, preparatory and elementary schools. In the name of the workers and their factories, who are brought to a standstill every time this vital artery, the Ḥilwān Metro, is disrupted. In the name of the vegetable sellers, who fill the Metro platforms with their wet sacks and baskets of watercress, mint, mallow and spinach. In the name of the ordinary citizens, crammed into the carriages every public holiday, searching for a little bit of air to breathe ... [98]

Zayd bin 'Ubayd also makes use of rhetorical questions, such as: "Do we not pay taxes to get services in return?",[99] and: "We are but cogs in a machine, but what use are good cogs when the machine is rusty?"[100] He also employs terms of address, as in his announcement to the Minister of Transport: "I address you, Your Excellency, in the name of all those people";[101] and makes repeated use of the vocative particle *yā,* as in: "I offer up this plea to you, O You Who can deliver",[102] and: "O Saviour of the drowning, save your ship from sinking!"[103]

Another feature of this text is that it gives reference to other genres, such as the elegy (*marthiya*), which lends its name to Zayd bin 'Ubayd's first complaint. "Marthiya" is not an elegy of classical construction, and is faithful to only very few of its characteristics; indeed, the main element it shares with the classical elegy is that it marks the passing of a loved one, which is in this case Cairo. The tone of "Marthiya" is passionate and often bitter, as in: "How, O Cairo, did your pure towers and

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[98] Ibid., pp. 301-302.
[99] Ibid., p. 302.
[100] Ibid., p. 308.
[101] Ibid., p. 302.
[102] Ibid., p. 310.

minarets come to overlook thousands upon thousands of rubbish dumps, and thousands upon thousands of swamps?"[104] Another shared element relates to the use of the apostrophe, as in: "O, my conquered Cairo, it has not been your day ...!",[105] while a third point relates to the voice of the poet, and those he speaks for. Like the classical elegy, "Marthiya" is monodic, yet we sense also that Zayd bin 'Ubayd speaks for the group, as his classical forebears did. Like them, he alludes to the loss of status and security that the loved one's death has brought to the group, and gives voice to their grief, anxieties and fears. Further, he articulates his hatred of and contempt for the dead one's enemies, appearing to implicate them in the cause of the loved one's death. In this way, he exploits the elegy form for the purposes of propaganda, or as a means of moving the group into taking political action.

Besides the above, two further features of "Marthiya" are personification:

> How did they disfigure your loveliness, filling your cheeks with pimples and your face with wrinkles and scars, so that everyone — worthy or otherwise — began to ridicule you?;[106]

and metaphor:

> How did traitors emerge from your womb to strike an accursed treaty with flies? Those friends of death and suffering, for whom they prepared a cozy bed from rubbish, and plenty of wholesome food from the contagious, disgusting waste.[107]

In all, Zayd bin 'Ubayd tends to distort or subvert the characteristics of the classical elegy, as when he addresses "Marthiya" to a personified place, rather than to a person. More significantly, he ironically overturns its eulogising function: typically, the elegy praises the person who has died, and celebrates his merits, glorious attributes and

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[103] Ibid., p. 317. This alludes to the eloquent peasant's second complaint, which reads: "Bringer to shore of all who are drowning, save one who is shipwrecked." "The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant", op. cit., p. 39.
[104] "Shakwā", p. 300.
[105] Ibid., p. 301.
[106] Ibid., p. 300.
[107] Ibid., p. 301. This is a reference to the Camp David Accords.

exploits, since these are taken as reflecting on the group itself. Furthermore, it dwells on the "moral qualities" of the deceased, such as his intelligence, courage, generosity and decency.[108] In "Marthiya", however, we find a degraded, fallen hero(ine), who is devoid of any morality, and is wretched and defiled. There are no proud accounts of her valour or glory, rather, the text tells only of her weakness and subjugation. Perhaps most tragic is the fact that it is not the enemies of Cairo that have brought about her ruin, but her own people, as we may see from Zayd bin 'Ubayd's proclamation: "How did your sons disavow you, and do to you what your enemies did not?"[109] In this way, "Marthiya" takes a satirical, contemptuous swipe at Egypt's vices and follies, rather than celebrating its glory and civilisational greatness.

The text also alludes to the *du'ā'*, which, in the Islamic context, is an invocation addressed to Allah, in which the speaker makes a personal "prayer of request", either on behalf of himself or another, or even against another.[110] While understood largely as a personal prayer, the Islamic invocation can also be offered up for the common good of the community, "the *du'ā'* being regarded as a prayer or request for well-being, especially the public weal of the Muslim community, and the personal spiritual well-being of oneself and others".[111] Zayd bin 'Ubayd's fifth complaint bears the title "Du'ā'", and takes the form of a prayer of request, as follows:

> O God, restore our consciences so that we might restore our transportation services.
> O God, cleanse our minds and streets of the swamps and rubbish dumps.
> O God, purify our hearts so that our hands might be purified of bribes, our tongues purified of hypocrisy, and our actions purified of negligence and indifference.[112]

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[108] C. Pellat, "Marthiya", *EI²*, p. 605.
[109] "Shakwā", p. 300.
[110] L. Gardet, "Du'ā'", *EI²*, p. 617.
[111] Ibid., p. 617. Examples include the *istisqā'* (prayer for rain) and prayers for the dead.
[112] "Shakwā", p. 318.

The sentiment of "Du'ā'" is somewhat high-flown, and it appears to be constructed in a self-consciously ironic manner, although the ideas which inform it are unquestionably genuine. As the following excerpts show, Zayd bin 'Ubayd uses the invocation form to address Egypt's social, psychological and attitudinal ills:

> O God, give us strength so that we might applaud the excellent, and not hinder their progress nor feel resentment towards them, but prepare for them every opportunity for excellence, so as to make them even more so. Give us wisdom, O God, so that we might realise that the nation in which the mediocre decree to execute the excellent, is a nation whose fate is nothingness.[113]

> O God, give us the faith [to believe] that adults are an example to the young, and that planning and order, hard work and production, and reward to those who do good and retribution to those who do bad (and not the other way round), and respect for freedom of opinion (even if it differs from ours), is the "magic wand" for today's world; a wand which will enable us to triumph over our enemies, which will grant us dignity, and which will relieve us of the nightmare of high prices and the housing and transport crises; a wand which will cure our education system of its ills, which will save our hospitals from the abyss and will relieve them of their afflictions, and which will cleanse our roads and waters.[114]

In short, "Du'ā'" is a sort of social and political agenda, or a schedule of requests by which Egypt's problems can be put to rights.

As has been mentioned, "Shakwā" has little narrative or dramatic development. One last reason for this is that this is essentially a text of ideas, and its discourse is shaped by the ideological concerns underpinning it. It was produced at a time when popular unrest in Egypt was gaining momentum; strikes were being held on an almost daily basis; and only a month after its first installment was published, violent food riots broke out across the country. In such an overtly ideological text, it is hard to resist the temptation of searching for evidence of the author's own political sensibility. For, like Zayd bin 'Ubayd, al-Shārūnī and other Egyptian intellectuals felt alienated and distanced from both state and society, yet lacked the confidence and often the means to voice their predicament. Thus, in creating a character such as Zayd bin 'Ubayd, the

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[113] Ibid., p. 318.

author creates a platform for his views which he would not otherwise have been afforded, which also places him at a distance from which he can criticise relatively freely.[115]

In view of their outspoken and often hard-hitting content, it is both tragic and ironic that Zayd bin 'Ubayd's complaints were never sent. Even when they are finally "published" by the frame narrator, they lose some of their authority by being second- (or even third-) hand, and thereby take on an ambivalent "fictional" distance. What this tells us is that fear of the other is still a reality: while the critical inner self protests, the socially-aware external self continues to censor, and to exercise reticence and caution. Indeed, the dimension of fear is pronounced, from the threat of reprisals against critics of the regime, to paranoid concerns about Israeli spies, to the fact that Zayd bin 'Ubayd's sons urge the frame narrator not to publish any more of their father's letters.[116] What this indicates is that the mood of national confidence and euphoria which followed Sadat's war against Israel was short-lived, soon giving way to renewed fear and social paralysis.

3. "I'tirāfāt Ḍayyiq al-Khulq wa'l-Mathāna" ("Confessions of a Quick-Tempered, Weak-Bladdered Man"), 1981

On first sight, "I'tirāfāt Ḍayyiq al-Khulq wa'l-Mathāna" ("Confessions of a Quick-Tempered, Weak-Bladdered Man"),[117] appears to have dispensed with the optimism of "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh", and to have jumped back to the pessimism of "al-Ziḥām"

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[114] Ibid., p. 319.

[115] These days, al-Shārūnī is an active social commentator and writes regular letters and short essays on social issues for the Egyptian dailies, which is perhaps an indication of a freer political climate. A recent example is "Rūshitta Muwājahat al-Yaḥaddī" ("A Prescription for Facing the [Coming] Challenge"), published in *al-Ahrām*, 14 August 1998. In this, he discusses the historian Arnold Toynbee's argument that the Arabs will counter the challenge of the creation of the state of Israel with an equivalent challenge. Al-Shārūnī cites the eradication of illiteracy, a "revolution" in the education system, the establishment of a "scientific society", administrative reform and increased democratisation as being among the factors needed to realise this prophecy.

[116] Although the frame narrator changes the identities of those mentioned in the letters, Zayd bin 'Ubayd's sons eventually ask him to give the letters back, since they discuss "personal matters, which they are embarrassed to see [being] published". "Shakwā", p. 320.

and "Lamaḥāt". While it is true that "I'tirāfāt" has much in common with these two texts, it would be more accurate to say that it contains a fusion of intertextual references to a much wider range of stories — "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh", "Naẓariyya" and "Shakwā" among them — resulting in a subtly dynamic, activist narrative, which finds its points of reference in the Egypt of the early Eighties.

What first connects "I'tirāfāt" to "al-Ziḥām" and "Lamaḥāt" is its use of a first-person narrator/anti-hero, who is sequestrated from the external world.[118] Second is the theme of criminality: the narrator has been imprisoned for assaulting and grievously wounding his neighbour, Police Sergeant 'Arafa, and is awaiting news of his victim's — and, ultimately, his own — fate. Third is the theme of the breaking of sexual taboos: it is suggested in the text that the narrator has been conducting an illicit affair with Sergeant 'Arafa's wife, Maḥāsin. Fourth is the relationship between anxiety and irrationality: when Maḥāsin locks the weak-bladdered narrator out of the toilet one day, he explodes in a fit of frustration and rage, and stabs her husband in the neck with a broken bottle.

This attack seems at first to be a classic crime of passion, carried out in a moment of hot-headedness or madness. The narrator, who admits that he has committed a number of petty offences in the past, insists: "As for this, it is my greatest crime; the first and, I believe, the last."[119] The discourse of the narrator's confessions, however, seems to dispute the vagarious nature of the attack, and reveals a number of factors contributing to the crime, rooting it in a series of developmental traumas. Nonetheless, no single cause or motive is ever fully arrived at, and the narrator remains confused about his actions to the very end:

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[117] Hereafter cited as "I'tirāfāt".

[118] In this case, the narrator is speaking from a prison cell.

[119] "I'tirāfāt", p. 50.

> Was her husband's outburst against me simply [a matter] of a husband's honour when his wife is insulted in a dispute? [...] Or could it have been because of his suspicions about the manœuvres going on between us behind his back, some whisperings about which must have reached his ears? And do you suppose my recklessness towards him — which led [me] almost to the verge of slaughtering [him] — was simply because he had tried to "teach me a lesson I wouldn't forget", as he put it, in revenge for the abuse his wife had been subjected to? Or was it so as to get rid of him, and clear the way for us? [Either way,] it seems my blow was more violent than I had expected it to be, for here is my prison cell — and neither he nor she is here with me.[120]

Besides sharing key themes with "al-Ziḥām" and "Lamaḥāt", "I'tirāfāt" also shares a common tension in its tone. The overt defiance of "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh" has been replaced once more by a mood of anxiety, marked by undertones of repression, neurosis and psychosis. Another shared characteristic is a reasserted ambivalence — and, in parts, open hostility — towards figures of authority in all their manifestations, be they policemen, judges, teachers, or even parents. Our narrator is once again a man of provincial origin who, on arriving in Cairo, claims to be both "apprehensive about it and filled with desire for it".[121] Then there is the fact that, like Fatḥī and Mawjūd, he harbours literary aspirations, yet is blessed with neither the brilliance nor the requisite "talents" for success.[122] We also find some continuity in the choice of narrative location: "I'tirāfāt" is narrated from the confines of a prison cell, echoing Fatḥī's asylum ward and Mawjūd's rooftop "fortness and snare".[123] Perhaps most significant is the fact that the text shows a return to the familiar sights, sounds and sensations of the crowd, as we see from the depiction of the narrator's domestic environment:

> ... I was glad to be living with my cousin, as this would lessen my feelings of exile in such a vast and crowded city as Cairo, where one neighbour doesn't even know the next. With us were a third and fourth tenant, who occupied the two other adjoining rooms. The hall, kitchen and toilet were communally-shared facilities.
>
> When the two adjoining rooms became vacant, they were taken by a family made up of a father, mother and five children: four children in one room and the parents and their baby in the other. It didn't matter that there were

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[120] Ibid., p. 48.

[121] Ibid., p. 47.

[122] That is, the necessary social connections.

[123] "Lamaḥāt", p. 40.

> unmarried students such as my cousin and I in the same flat, for crowding necessitates its own laws.[124]

Strategies of Resisting Self-Eradication

It is when we turn to the issue of identity, however, that features emerge in "I'tirāfāt" which distinguish it from "al-Ziḥām" and "Lamaḥāt". If we identify the narrator as the narrative self, our first observation is that, unlike Fatḥī and Mawjūd, he has no personal name, being the most immediate marker of individual (and even collective) identity. Hence, the reader constructs the self from a combination of implicit textual clues and concrete biographical data, deducing from his narration that he is male and is somewhere in his late twenties or early thirties,[125] and that he is single and works as a collector of premiums for an insurance company. He presents himself to the reader using a formula used by Fatḥī: "I am the Quick-Tempered, Weak-Bladdered Man, So-and-So, son of Such-and-Such, son of What's-his-Name."[126] His lack of a name betrays his relationship to society: he is a "nobody", forgotten or merely overlooked, while his brief genealogy also suggests that his forebears were similarly ignored or unacknowledged. Also significant is the fact that the only specificity the self attaches to himself relates to the other's perception of his "condition", being his highly-strung temperament and his incontinence.

Of the many others in the text, most prominent is the hegemonic other, locus of power, ideology and the law. The text is replete with its agents, among them the narrator's mother, who toilet-trains him; his nursery nurse, who forbids him to go to the toilet during class; 'Āyida, daughter of the local Police Commissioner, whom he loves but who does not love him back; the newspaper editors who refuse to publish his poems; Sergeant 'Arafa, whom he assaults; and the examining magistrate at the judicial enquiry. Once again, the other assumes the role of superego, repressing the

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[124] "I'tirāfāt", p. 48.

[125] This assumption is based on the fact that he states that it has been ten years since he came to study at university.

self's primal needs and desires. Charismatic, powerful, yet frustratingly unattainable, as superego the other is also a manifestation of the narrator's ideal self. We see this in the way the self defines its civilisational other, Europe, by its clean, hygienic toilets and gleaming public conveniences, and by its cultivated activities such as theatre-going and concerts. Descriptions such as: "Nothing amazed me as much as the toilets: their lighting, their cleanliness, their architectural beauty and their fragrant smell",[127] reveal a rarely-exoticised other.

The narrative offers some tentative explanations for the self's condition, among them sibling rivalry and infantile neurosis:

> My mother told me that from the age of two I was no longer wetting myself, unlike other children my age. They were amazed at this, and would boast about it before family guests. When my little brother was born, however — seven days after, to be precise, by which time I was already four — they discovered that I had wet myself in the night. My mother shouted at me: "Should I be looking after you, or your little brother? You're a big [boy] now, and big boys don't wet themselves." The next night my mother discovered that her shouting had had no effect. She spanked me soundly and rubbed my nose in my wet clothes, which I made wetter still with my tears. The next night she threatened to burn off my "willy", at which I screamed, cried, kissed her hands and pleaded with her, promising and swearing [that I wouldn't do it again].[128]

> When an educated relative came to visit us, they [my parents] complained to him about my dirtiness and stubbornness. His opinion — they told me later — was that this was due to my being jealous of my younger brother, because he was monopolising my mother's attention. I wanted to tell them that, just like him, I was still in need of my mother's care, love and affection ... [129]

Yet the discourse also alludes here to the influence of the other, suggesting that this is at the source of the self's unfortunate predicament. The other wields power over, punishes and humiliates the self, and among its preconceived societal expectations is that the self will be trained to be in control of its bodily functions. As such, it perceives the self as weak, degenerate, out-of-control and deviant. Marked by its incontinence

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[126] "I'tirāfāt", p. 50. Cf. "I am Fatḥī 'Abd al-Rasūl, bus conductor, poet, lover and lunatic", "al-Ziḥām". p. 21.
[127] Ibid., p. 61.
[128] Ibid., p. 50.

and unchecked neurotic outbursts, the self is condemned as anti-social and criminal, its weak bladder a signifier of physical, mental and, ultimately, moral weakness.

All interaction between the self and the other conforms to the classic hegemonic master/slave dynamic; "reconciliation" is never attained, and the narrative is marked by a tangible tension, reflecting a push-pull process of oppression and resistance. As usual, the other attempts to reconcile the self by force, via a process of naturalisation (that is, ideology instilled by fear and the threat of punishment), and, if all else fails, sequestration from society. This last course of action is justified on account of the "disobedient", "irrational" behaviour of the self, and the destabilising impact this might have on society. I would argue that it is the threat of the hegemonic other in general (be it actual or perceived), which lies at the root of the narrator's anxiety neurosis, rather than incidental factors such as the birth of a sibling.

It is easy to assume here that the self in "I'tirāfāt" is cast solely in the mould of Fatḥī and Mawjūd. Yet we may argue that it is also a descendent of Umm Sayyid, for it sets out to resist the hegemonic other and, where possible, to actively challenge or undermine it. In fact, its endeavours are generally unsuccessful, but what is significant is that it attempts such acts of resistance in the first place. The strategies of resistance the self employs are many: first, it overturns the notion that the lack of a name deprives it of a sense of identity. For, by remaining nameless, it is ultimately spared the subjectivity of naming, a process instigated by, and in accordance with the desires of, the other. Further, while the absence of a name may prohibit a sense of *personal* identity, this does not preclude the development of a sense of *collective* identity. As the narrator shows, while the "confessions" of his formative years are marked by feelings of exclusion, he later becomes aware that there are other people like him, and grows to view himself as a member of a culturally distinct group. Thus we may argue that the narrator finds, rather than loses, his individual sense of self in the group, and

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[129] Ibid., p. 51.

that the moniker "Quick-Tempered, Weak-Bladdered Man" is in fact consciously self-chosen, rather than externally-imposed, highlighting his sense of collective identity.

Second, we may argue that the self actively resists the other's naturalising or socialising tendencies, converting its negative self-image into a positive one in the process. The narrator achieves this by drawing on the strength he derives from his minority identity, and by mobilising his fellow sufferers into a "League of Weak-Bladdered Men and Women".[130] This overtly political act serves two purposes: first, it is an affirmation of the group's distinctness from society, rather than an appeal for assimilation into it; second, it serves as a platform for the narrator's vision of a new, more just social order, in which the rights of his minority are respected and acted upon. In this way, his confessions function in part as an agenda or manifesto for his League, in which he cites the objectives of "the spreading of bladder consciousness";[131] "the drawing up of explanatory maps and illustrative graphs [showing] the public conveniences in the world's major cities";[132] and "the establishment of branches for our members in all Egyptian cities from Aswān to Alexandria".[133]

Third, the self overturns the myth, inculcated in him from infancy, that in order to be considered "a man" he must learn to be in control of his bodily functions, which tells us much about the values of "polite" society, and the way it expects the individual to behave. As the self is well aware, the problem inherent in such a dogmatic approach is that it fails to take into account the possibility of human failing. Thus, it is perhaps as a means of taking revenge that the self sets out to expose the artifice of so-called polite society, and to disprove the myth of its genteel ascendancy:

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[130] Ibid., p. 53.
[131] Ibid., p. 63.
[132] Ibid., p. 63.
[133] Ibid., p. 64.

> [...] the toilet is the last place householders are concerned with making presentable; it never occurs to many of them that their guests might leave the boundaries of the sitting-room, which they have taken pains to make the show case of their home. Rarely does the lady of the house take this strange and sudden request from one of her guests into consideration. And how great is the shift from the sitting-room to the toilet! Thus I would be asked if I would wait a while (as my bladder is fit to burst, distracting me from everything around me), for as long as [it takes] the lady of the house to finish making the toilet presentable (in an attempt to turn it into another sitting-room), and to tidy the route to it. [...] On my return I will notice things I had not noticed at the time of my ordeal. For this reason, she has to move aside any children's toys or shoes I might trip over, or perhaps hide the piles of dirty washing in the kitchen, and pull the chain to make sure that it flushes with a gushing flush of water. She will dress the toilet and everything around it with bits of decoration, as if it were one of the sitting-room chairs, and will make it so perfumed that one would imagine it had been created for an entirely different purpose.[134]

As al-Dīb observes, "I'tirāfāt" not only details the crisis of the narrator and his predicament, but also details "the crisis of civilisation and the crisis of the middle class, which tries constantly to conceal the painful truth by numerous [means of] deception and embellishment".[135] Yet the text also alludes to a ridiculous irony: while the middle class — in its desire to avoid all acknowledgement of "dirty" bodily functions — makes its toilets as elegant and as fragrant as its sitting-rooms, that same middle class (in the form of ministers, civil servants and the like) is closing Egypt's public toilets and making the country uglier and less sanitary as a result.[136] For the self, this is also a form of punishment, since it deprives it of a rare source of comfort and security.

A fourth strategy of resistance is that, while the dynamics of relations in the narrator's small-scale environment seem to indicate his weakness and vulnerability, the narrative discourse shows that this is a self actively engaged in counter-attack. The text

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[134] Ibid., pp. 58-59. Another example of the conflict between "appearance" and "reality" is when the narrator confesses: "Before strangers I would appear to be calm, so that they would quote me as an example of what they called 'good manners'". Ibid., p. 55.

[135] Al-Dīb, op, cit., p. 246.

[136] The narrator expresses the middle-class "fear" or repression of bodily functions through the discursive space of the middle-class home. In one instance he describes the transition from the front to the back of the house (that is, from living-room to toilet) as a journey from the house's "conscious to its unconscious". "I'tirāfāt", p. 59. In another case he describes the toilet as the "private parts" (*'awra*) of the house. Ibid., p. 59.

is punctuated throughout by acts of aggression against the other: as a child the narrator hits Ḥukrush, the policeman's son, on the head with a brick, while as an adult he stabs Sergeant 'Arafa with a bottle. Similarly, as a child the narrator drowns ants by urinating on them,[137] which in adult life becomes both a metaphor for self-expression and a rallying cry for his weak-bladdered minority. As the narrator tells his urologist:

> — "I want to piss on the whole world!"
> — "You are very ambitious."
> — "I am very frustrated! They have taken all the toilets away from my city."[138]

In psychological terms, these gestures of rebellion and contempt are acts of transference, with the narrator displacing his unresolved conflicts onto substitute objects. Thus, by attacking Ḥukrush or Sergeant 'Arafa, the self is striking a blow at the hegemonic other, and by urinating on the ants he is expressing his desire to obliterate the social order of which he is, reluctantly, a part.

Confessional Discourse and the Issue of Freedom

As its title betrays, "I'tirāfāt" is an example of confessional discourse. Confessions are a type of autobiography which tends to "dwell on the author's honesty in admitting and describing former sinfulness or wrong-doing".[139] In terms of its composition, the text is speculative or reflective in nature, articulated by fragments of stream of consciousness or association, borne by memories going back to the time of the narrator's childhood. Lacking much of the disjointed, illogical characteristics of earlier texts, the narrator's confessions are generally lucid and controlled, with a much clearer sense of cause and effect and contiguity. This process of causality is developed through a series of flashbacks, which help the reader not only to piece the disparate events of the narrative together, but also to understand the ironic relationship between the narrator's social development and his quick-tempered, weak-bladdered state.

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[137] This image is also given in the short story "al-Mu'dam al-Thāmin", op. cit.
[138] "I'tirāfāt", p. 63.
[139] Gray, op. cit., p. 69.

The confessions are also punctuated by brief snatches of dialogue: between the voices of the narrator and his examining magistrate, and, in another instance, the narrator and his urologist (see note 138 above). Given our understanding that the narrator is alone in his cell, we can assume that this dialogue is re-enacted or remembered, rather than an actual exchange between the characters involved. It should be noted that it is not clear whether the narrator is really alone; there is a casual, yet isolated, reference to an implied narratee, as we see when the narrator announces: "Oh ... please excuse me, my bladder's about to burst. [I'll be] two minutes."[140] On the one hand, this could signify the presence of a cell-mate, though it probably indicates that the narrator is speaking to himself.

Pivotal to the confessions is the attack on Sergeant 'Arafa, the most crucial factor in determining the narrator's fate. As the threat of execution appears to grow with increasing certainty, the narrator appears to suggest (as Mawjūd did before him) that this is no worse a punishment than being condemned to go on living. As he declares in his opening statement: "At three minutes to five I was a man condemned to live; at two minutes past five I became a man almost condemned to die."[141] Thus, the five-minute time span during which the attack takes place is sufficient for the other to determine the fate of the self.[142] This provocative opening statement sets the tone for the entire text: while its parallel clauses appear to suggest an uneasy balance, they in fact betray the precariousness of the self's existence.

The discourse generates a sense of the narrator's agitation, and of the stifling, maddening restrictiveness of his world. Like him, the text attempts to maintain some semblance of equilibrium; its sentences and paragraphs are of a carefully controlled, manageable length, although often containing densely-packed syntax. As the narrator

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[140] "I'tirāfāt", p. 54.

[141] Ibid., p. 47.

[142] We might even suggest that its fate is *pre*determined by the other; the narrator tells us that his parents would frequently forecast: "You're going to end up in prison." Ibid., p. 52.

becomes increasingly animated, his sentences and particularly his paragraphs lengthen, as he vents his feelings of anger and injustice. He tries constantly to drag himself back from the point of explosion, and to check on those terrible outbursts that have led to his current predicament. As the narrative reaches its climax, the closing image is of him trying desperately to defend himself, as his cries of protest shatter into ruptured, repetitive, rhyming clauses, and his bladder finally bursts.

The confessions are also heavily symbolic, with many symbols corresponding to one of the key themes in the text: freedom and its relationship to the individual and society. The most prominent example is the symbol of the prison cell, a clearly-delimited, inescapable structure forming a textual space of oppression and confinement. Imprisonment, or merely an absence of freedom, is the most salient feature of the narrator's existence, and can be contextualised along physical and ideological lines. Another key symbol is the generic "authority figure", most evident in the proliferation of policemen in the text. Less immediate, but just as prevalent, is the symbol of the bladder, which signifies the other and its oppressive, restrictive tendencies, and which the narrator rather fittingly describes as his "prison".[143] The toilet, meanwhile, is a metaphor for freedom and, in the narrator's view, is the one true marker of civilisation. As he asserts: "My experiences have taught me that the toilet in a home is an indicator of how civilised its occupants are. In exactly the same way, public conveniences are an indicator of the level of civilisation among peoples."[144]

Taking the toilet as a metaphor for freedom, it is interesting to note how the narrator distinguishes between the poor state of toilets in the Arab world, and the comparative superiority of those in the West. We see this particularly in his discussions about public conveniences; on the one hand he states: "Our Egyptian cities, and most of the

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[143] Ibid., p. 58.
[144] Ibid., p. 59.

Arab countries, are among the poorest as regards these civilisational landmarks",[145] while on the subject of their European counterparts he claims:

> When I entered them for the first time I didn't want to leave, because I felt psychologically and physically at ease. I noticed that my sharpness of temper had decreased, indeed it had almost disappeared. I was no longer quarrelling for the most trivial of reasons; I was no longer reaching the point of explosion. Whenever my bladder filled up I could empty it, simply and without any trouble.[146]

While it would be naive to suggest that "I'tirāfāt" is a wholesale defence of European civilisational superiority, the text does appear to allude to the comparative lack of freedom in Egypt and the Arab world, be it political freedom or merely the individual right to be accepted for what one is. Thus the narrator defines and defends the rights of his weak-bladdered minority, while campaigning against oppression and for "civilisational" — that is, attitudinal and behavioural — change.

It is also useful to consider the function of the narrator's confessions. On the one hand, they express a reflexive attempt to understand the self, and represent an evolving process of self-development and self-knowledge which, as in other texts, is a route towards establishing a coherent sense of identity. In line with the many psychoanalytic concepts and motifs in the narrative, the confessions also function as a form of catharsis, where the act of narrating is also a form of therapy, involving a discharging of emotion attached to a repressed, traumatic experience. Thus the confessions play a liberating, rather than self-punishing, role; they acknowledge the subliminal desires of the unconscious and give a voice to the narrator and his shameful condition, while serving also as a platform for his self-defence. This overturns the traditional function of confessionary discourse, in that it argues a case for the innocence of the self, rather than admitting to any conscious wrong-doing.

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[145] Ibid., p. 63.
[146] Ibid., p. 61.

To end, what ultimately sets the narrator of "I'tirāfāt" apart from Fatḥī and Mawjūd, and what brings him closer to narrative selves such as Umm Sayyid, is that, in spite of his imprisonment, he does not feel irrevocably isolated, while his world has well-defined purpose and meaning. Therein, of course, lies the irony (and tragedy) of his predicament: behind his quest for self-affirmation, and his aspirations for a fairer, more dignified existence, lies the reason for his imprisonment and probable execution. On the strength of this, it could be argued that this narrative is an allegory for the predicament of all of Egypt's minorities at this time, be they Copts, intellectuals, or even women.[147] For, by showing how the other attempts to contain the "undesirable" self, the text also reveals how the state attempts to negate its ideologically "undesirable" minorities, even if the roots of the contradictions they raise are to be found in the state itself, and the society it has created.

4. "Al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība li-Infiṣāl Ra's Mīm" ("The Strange Events Surrounding the Detachment of Mīm's Head"), 1993

"Al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība li-Infiṣāl Ra's Mīm" ("The Strange Events Surrounding the Detachment of Mīm's Head"),[148] concerns a middle-aged man known only as "Mīm".[149] With no reason or warning, Mīm begins to undergo a strange bodily transformation: his torso grows larger and flabbier, while his neck grows longer and thinner. Besides suffering from pains in his head and neck, Mīm also finds that he has started to lose control over his reactions: he frequently erupts into violence and fits of rage, and suffers from excessive, uncontrollable cravings for sex and food. His doctor carries out tests on him, but their results do not point to any recognised form of illness. He is then sent to see a specialist in London, where his illness is diagnosed, but he is told that, as yet, no cure is available. On returning to Egypt his condition worsens: his head and body appear to be pulling in different directions, until one night

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[147] The narrator acknowledges that there are others even less fortunate than himself: weak-bladdered women.

[148] Hereafter cited as "al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība".

[149] "Mīm" corresponds to the letter "m" in English, making Mīm rather like Kafka's "K" in *The*

they struggle so violently that his head snaps away from his body. As Mīm's wife calls for an ambulance, the body refuses to allow the head to be saved, rising up on its legs and crushing it with its backside. Unable to survive independently of the head, the body also perishes. Although unique in many respects, "al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība" reintroduces themes explored in a number of earlier stories, such as the mind-body dualism found in "Jasad min Ṭīn", and the nature and definition of disease and disorder, prominent in "I'tirāfāt". Indeed, Mīm's condition is similar to that of the narrator of "I'tirāfāt", in that he is perceived to be abnormal, yet tests have not identified or given a name to his disease.

Fragmented Body, Fractured Self

Mīm's sense of selfhood seems, at first, to be largely intact. With the onset of the changes in his body, however, he finds that his sense of personal identity has become fractured and decentred. The splitting of the subject is represented in the physical description of Mīm's splitting body, with the head attempting to go in one direction, and the body in another. Thus, he eventually breaks into two autonomous parts: the head, or site of his so-called rationality, and the body, which is little more than a mass of urges and instincts. In an attempt to cling to the memory of his cohesive sense of self, Mīm allies himself with his head, while distancing himself from his body, or other. As the narrator explains, Mīm identifies with his head, rather than with his body, since he feels estranged from his body's passionate outbursts and lustful behaviour.

A series of parallel processes takes place in the narrative self: the body and ego diffuse, the psychic and physical split, while the subject becomes at once both observer and observed. Most frightening of all, Mīm feels that the two part-structures of his self are splitting willfully from each other, and that they are in actual *conflict* with each other. As he attempts to resist his loss of psychic and physical integrity, he

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notes "that his mind's control over his body had begun to deteriorate".[150] After laying the foundations in "I'tirāfāt", it is in this text that al-Shārūnī breaks definitively with the Cartesian view of reality, and its assumptions of cognitive rationalism and the body as subject to the sovereignty of the mind. Instead, he shows the body rebelling and fighting against this so-called rational mind, to the point where their former interdependence is severed irrevocably.

We may speak of two types of other in this text, the specular and the symbolic. It is apparent that, prior to the onset of his physical transformation, Mīm sees himself as whole at the psychic level, and as having complete control over his body.[151] On returning to the mirror, however, he witnesses the seemingly autonomous splitting of his body, and the emergence of an alien, specular other, thereby estranging him from his former sense of wholeness. Mīm is a concrete example of Lacan's *corps morcelé* ("fragmented body"), where the alienating identity of the ego is represented structurally in the dismembered body, and where the anxiety to be a secure "I" is threatened by a retrospective pull towards fragmentation.[152] As a result, he experiences one resulting part-ego — the head — as "self", with the split-off body consigned to the realm of the other. His attitude towards his head and body is antithetical: the head, with its logic and rationality is "good", while the body, with its wayward lustfulness, is "bad".

Besides the specular other, we also find a symbolic other, being that which structures Mīm's subjectivity. Like so many of al-Shārūnī's protagonists, it is on account of the symbolic other that Mīm perceives himself as "abnormal": his body is perceived as grotesque, deformed and diseased, while his behaviour is perceived as sinful and anti-social. He is constantly cautioned by those around him that he is "changing", which implies that "to change" is something negative. His wife asks:

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[150] "Al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība", p. 7.

[151] Reflecting the condition arrived at in infancy at Lacan's "mirror stage".

"Haven't you noticed something strange about you in the mirror?",[153] while his boss declares: "You look strange today, Mīm. Have you seen a doctor? If you haven't already, then do so right away."[154] As he changes — and as others perceive him change — Mīm begins to generate fear in the people around him, combined with feelings of disgust, repulsion and contempt. Even his wife, who strives to remain supportive throughout his ordeal, shows ambivalence in her perceptions of him:

> She found herself shunning — and not shunning — him. Conflicting thoughts went through her mind, for she had had a long married life with him, during which they had faced both good and bad times. And now she found herself with a deformed freak, who had a few remaining features of her lover and husband — and yet didn't. He had started to make her shudder and fear for her safety, although he was a part of her.[155]

"Embodying" Power Relations in Egypt

As we have seen with the example of Fatḥī in "al-Ziḥām", the body is a bearer of social meaning, and is "an important source of metaphors about the organization and disorganization of society".[156] As such, the narrative representation of Mīm and his body is a system of signs, through which power relations in Egypt may be interpreted and even challenged. Mīm's physique is itself a narrative within a narrative, the critique of which permits a critique of Egyptian society. The discourse facilitates such a critique by various means, chief among them being the employment of symbolism.

The main symbol in the text is Mīm himself, who should be considered here on three levels: first, as a cohesive site of conscious subjectivity, and second and third, as two fragmented sub-parts, the head (to which is the added the neck), and the body. Mīm the conscious self may be read a metaphor for the nation-state, the centre of the system from which everything originates, and to which all things refer or return. In turn, this system is constructed from a binary pair — government, and the body politic

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[152] Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Fontana Press, 1991), p. 26.
[153] "Al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība", p. 8.
[154] Ibid., p. 9.
[155] Ibid., p. 15.

— represented in the text by Mīm's head and body respectively. These two last figures are particularly transparent; since a "head" refers literally to a chief or boss, it may refer here to the head of state, functioning metonymically as a symbol for the government, while the "body" politic refers to the Egyptian citizenry.

The head, as we have seen, expresses qualities of rationality as well as of leadership. Yet, ironically, Mīm loses complete control over both himself and his environment, and as the narrative demonstrates, he "loses his head" both figuratively and literally. This is why his doctors urge him to stay rational and in control, and to resist relinquishing the body at all costs. The head also signifies vanity or conceit, as in the expression "things have gone to his head", an association borne out in the following example:

> [...] this mutual mind-body estrangement intensified when it became apparent that the head's primary concerns were washing more than once a day, combing the hair carefully and having it cut when it grew long, shaving and scenting the chin each day, and trimming the moustache. Meanwhile, it disregarded bathing the body, and left it exuding the smell of sweat, stickiness, and the putridity from its pores, until it was afflicted by itching, which compounded its irritation and furious outbursts.[157]

Considered within the context of a critique of Egyptian power relations, the growing distance between the government and body politic is visible, as is the arrogant disregard of the country's leaders for its citizens. What is also clear is that, as the mutual distancing between the two parties grows, the government's control over the body politic is being steadily eroded.

The neck, which is severed from the body along with the head, also has ideologically significant associations. First, the word *raqaba* ("neck") can refer also to a slave or, in Islamic law, a person. As such, it bears the associations of power, ownership or legal responsibility, appropriate to the head and its leadership role.

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[156] Turner, op. cit., p. 26.

Second, the lengthening of Mīm's neck, and by that the elevating of the head over the body, has the connotation of superiority or supremacy, and alludes once again to the distance between ruler and ruled. The text contains a passage which echoes an entry in a dictionary, giving definitions and examples of the usage of the word:

> The dictionary says: "neck" or "nape"; also applies to the whole human. A name given to one of eminence and importance; kings are called by this name. It is said: "He has freed a neck", meaning a slave or a nation, and: "God has freed his neck", meaning He has rescued or saved him.
>
> Our popular proverbs say: "So-and-so has lengthened our neck", meaning: "he has honoured us." The opposite is: "He has made our neck [the length of] a sesame seed."[158]

By contrast, the lengthening of Mīm's neck is ironic, suggesting national dishonour, rather than honour.

The neck is also linked metonymically to the act of execution. After Mīm's head detaches itself from his body, the text gives four examples of executions among rulers and ruled:

> Al-Ḥajjāj bin Yūsuf al-Thaqfī was Ummayyad governor of Iraq. He entered al-Kūfa one day and, in a sermon in its mosque, announced his well-known quote: "I see heads that have ripened and are ready for the picking, and I am the one to pick them, and I see blood [running] between the turbans and the beards."[159]
>
> In January 1793 the guillotine cut off the head of Louis XVI, in the square known as Louis XV Square, which has now been renamed the Square of the Republic. The court of the French Revolution worked zealously and tirelessly until the prisons overflowed. The severing of heads from bodies by the guillotine was the punishment imposed on everyone, from Queen Marie Antoinette to the supporters of the revolution themselves.[160]
>
> The narrator said: King Shahrayar threw out his treacherous wife's neck, along with the necks of the slave men and women who had participated in the betrayal party. From then on, King Shahrayar began to take a wife every night, taking her virginity and then beheading her that same night. He continued to do this for three years.

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[157] "Al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība", pp. 19-20.

[158] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

[159] Ibid., p. 22.

[160] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

> The narrator said: Shahrayar of England, King Henry VIII, did the same with some of his eight faithful wives.[161]

While it would appear that Mīm's head detaches itself accidentally, it is nonetheless "executed" by the body, which crushes it to death. There appear to be ideological motivations behind this, in that is expresses the will and desire of the body politic to rid itself of a remote and conceited leadership, and to start a new national project by physically transforming and reconstructing itself. Yet, al-Shārūnī shows also how such an execution can at the same time be an act of suicide, for, by depriving itself of a head, the body itself cannot survive. Further, by citing the example of the French Revolution, he reminds us of how such a "liberating" act can turn against the people who have hitherto supported it — again, perhaps a veiled reference to the Egyptian Revolution, and the years of torture and oppression that followed it.

In "al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība", the author appears to evoke the image of an imaginary, ideal state, consisting of government and body-politic enjoying an interdependent relationship. This interdependence is repeated in many forms, particularly in the relationship between Mīm and his wife, once "a relationship between equals",[162] which is thrown into imbalance with the onset of Mīm's problems. As the narrator explains:

> His existence in her life used to confirm her existence. Now his existence — or non-existence, rather — denied her existence. Disturbed, she would ask herself: "Am I awake or in a nightmare?", but in her heart she declared: "I will never leave him in his time of trouble. I will stand by him. In spite of all of this, I need him and he needs me."[163]

In another example, the narrative is broken by a snatch of chorus, which focuses on the dualistic interdependence between head and body:

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[161] Ibid., p. 23. Note: Henry VIII had six wives.
[162] Ibid., p. 7.
[163] Ibid., p. 15.

A women's chorus sings the melody: *The tragedy is that they were both well aware ...*
A men's chorus breaks in with the melody: *And [yet] were not aware ...*
The women's chorus recommences, singing: *That neither of them could survive without the other.*
The melody of the men's chorus completes, explaining: *For the head interprets what it receives from the senses ...*
The women's chorus concludes: *Four of which are based in the head,*
The men's chorus recommences: *And decides on a way to respond,*
The women's chorus then sings, quickly: *And, at that instant, carries it out.*
The men's chorus: *Just as it brings order to the body's voluntary movements.*
The women's chorus: *And the involuntary, such as breathing, and the contracting and expanding of the heart.*
The men's chorus: *Meanwhile, at every moment, the body supplies the head with blood,*
The women's chorus: *And the oxygen it carries with it.*
The men's chorus: *And this is what makes the blood flow up [to the head],*
The whole chorus together: *For were it not for the body, there would be neither a head* (ra's) *nor a president* (ra'īs).[164]

In many ways, al-Shārūnī's vision of the ideal state appears to allude to Plato's *Republic*, in that its structure is imagined by reference to the human body. However, whereas Plato sees the human body as being composed of three parts (head, chest and abdomen), each of which corresponds to a soul faculty, a virtue, and an element of the state's structure,[165] al-Shārūnī sees the state as being constructed from two parts — head and body — corresponding, as we have seen, to the government and body politic.

As with "I'tirāfāt", this text raises the question of how Mīm's condition, its causes and nature might be defined: is it a disease, that is, a biological disturbance, or is it an illness, that is, an undesirable deviation from accepted social norms? As with his predecessors, Mīm's condition appears to fall within the realm of culture, rather than nature. Most significantly, within the collective context of the nation-state, Mīm's condition expresses a public, as well as a personal, form of "unhealth", representing a form of social sickness, or malaise. Notably, his *corps morcelé* reflects both the

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[164] Ibid., p. 19.
[165] For example: head → reason → wisdom → rulers.

vulnerable ontological status of the national self and the fracturing of the unity of the nation-state, while his functional defects allude to problems within the "system".

But from what sort of malaise is the Egyptian nation suffering? As the narrator tells us, Mīm's body was "becoming wild",[166] referring once again to the theme of "civilisational backwardness", prominent in such stories as "Naẓariyya" and "Shakwā". As ever, al-Shārūnī considers the possibility that this malaise might be self-perpetuated, by hinting that Mīm's condition might even be psychosomatic. Certainly, Mīm is morbidly obsessed by his illness, to the extent that this seems to constitute an ironic form of narcissism. Like Narcissus, he is in thrall to the potency of his own image, but this is due more to his grotesque and terrifying appearance, than to delusional self-admiration. Also like Narcissus, Mīm seems to bring about his own self-destruction, due to a masochistic tendency to sustain his feelings of terror. As the narrator explains: "He walked towards the mirror, not to be reassured, but to become more frightened."[167] And, when his doctor attempts to comfort him, emphasising the need for optimism, Mīm argues: "I think you are trying to reassure me", to which the doctor responds:

> No. I think you are trying to frighten yourself. Why do you see only the empty half of the cup? Beware of carrying your own defeat within you. Many diseases win because the patient loses his fighting spirit — more so than because of the virulence of the microbe or virus.[168]

The usual themes regarding Egypt's "civilisational backwardness" appear here. First is its technological and scientific underdevelopment, attested to by the need to send Mīm abroad to have his condition assessed, and the fact that the specialist who attends to him, the appropriately-named Dr. Ghānim,[169] is an Arab who "had become an English national, and whose ability meant that he could enter this [field of] precise

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[166] "Al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība", p. 21.
[167] Ibid., p. 8.
[168] Ibid., pp. 10-11.
[169] *Ghānim* means "successful".

specialisation, surpassing even the English themselves".[170] As Dr. Ghānim says: "If I were given one tenth of the budget that they give me for my research, I would go back to my country immediately — on the condition that I could avoid being hampered by routine and being hindered by the enemies of success."[171]

A second theme is the general reluctance to embrace the modern, new, or alien, as we see from the following:

> When Mīm was at the point of preparing to travel abroad, a significant development occurred. His head noticed that whenever he was about to take one of the steps towards travelling, such as getting a visa or a plane ticket, his body would become even heavier, as though resisting or protesting at the very thought. It was as though the head — and not the legs — had to carry the body from one place to the next. This was the final straw in the deteriorating relationship between Mīm's head and body, particularly with their attempts to tug and pull away from each other. It seemed that the slightest violence would all but tear them apart, which Mīm's head saw as further reason for the need to travel.[172]

Other themes include Egypt's inefficiency and lack of sanitation, thrown into relief by Mīm's impressions of the clinic in London:

> He was overwhelmed by the cleanliness of the place, the precise appointments, and the smiling way in which visitors were welcomed. All this reassured him of the accuracy of the tests, and of the diagnosis if possible, and of the treatment if there was to be one.[173]

It should not be concluded from this, however, that al-Shārūnī advocates wholesale imitation of the West as a solution to Egypt's ills. For he also represents London as a cold and gloomy place, lit by lightening and roaring with thunder, by no means an exotic or alluring image. Meanwhile, Dr. Ghānim gives Mīm discreet insight into British realities and priorities:

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[170] "Al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība", p. 17.
[171] Ibid., p. 17, cf. also "Du'ā'" in "Shakwā"
[172] "Al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība", pp. 16-17.
[173] Ibid., p. 17.

> Here, they are one of two types. On the personal level, they are extremely courteous, precise and civilised, especially if you are a guest. On the general level, however, they act in accordance with their own interests. These override all the examples and morals are taught in our countries, even if this leads to people being slaughtered.[174]

In this last of the texts we are examining in this thesis, there are many indications of a shift towards the post-modern: mimesis is de-emphasised, genres are defamiliarised, and the artistic construct becomes fragmented and discontinuous, containing discourses from fiction and non-fiction, "high" and popular culture. The dis-located, un-unified subject tends also towards the post-modern, as does the "flatness" of the narrative, due to its lack of psychological depth, and its distant, detached tone. This is sustained by the use of largely blank, denotative prose, which is at all times conventional and unembellished, yet which sheds little real light on Mīm's condition. There is also the lack of any authorial presence, and the removed, if not anonymous, voice of the narrator, suggesting that the text refuses on principle to pass comment on Mīm's predicament.

By contrast, the text's simple language is offset by its relatively complex structure. While the plot is a straightforward summary of events, its events are divided between two types of location, taking the following form: a short vignette of life within the home or workplace, followed by a scene at the doctor's, usually accompanied by a brief, flat dialogue. The narrative is thus constructed from a series of short shots, intermittently intruded upon by fragments of discourse from various genres, such as a dictionary "entry", an excerpt from a medical book, a poem, or a snatch of a chorus. As such, intertextuality is prominent, with allusions to reference books, chronicles, fiction such as the *Thousand and One Nights* and other stories by al-Shārūnī, lending it some of the pastiche qualities of "Shakwā". The text's self-conscious artificiality also enhances its detached tone, as does the forced disrupting of the continuum of the *fabula* by the shifting jumps and ruptures in the *szujet*.

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[174] Ibid., p. 18. This could well be a reference to the 1991 Gulf War.

Features enhancing the tone of distance and detachment include the fact that the text contains little superficial description, suggesting that al-Shārūnī is striving to avoid narrative depth or detail. Significantly, we cannot "see" the narrative location, either through the use of concrete images or spatial symbolism, as we can in stories such as "al-Ziḥām" and "Lamaḥāt"; nor do we find much description about the characters. Again, it is as though the author omits such things in order to avoid influencing the way in which Mīm's condition should be evaluated; whether this is out of a sense of personal insecurity, or so as to encourage the reader to deduce it for him/herself, can only be guessed at.

What is perhaps most unusual is the lack of any real emotional or psychological depth to the characters, which, when combined with the above, makes for what is at times a rather unnerving, dehumanised narrative world. This is not to say that the text lacks the potential to be playful; indeed, there is a satirical, and darkly comical edge to the text, drawing on elements of the marvellous and the downright bizarre. Nor does it appear to take itself too seriously, a fact attested to by its self-consciously artificial structure, and the way in which the surreal is juxtaposed with the realistic or rational. Lastly, the emphasis on the body is also a common characteristic of postmodern texts, tying in with the author's shift away from perspectivism.

Both the first and the last texts examined in this thesis centre on the body as narrative subject and object, but there have been changes in the way the body functions and is perceived. In "Jasad min Ṭīn" (and later "al-Ziḥām" and "I'tirāfāt"), the body conforms to the Foucauldian model of an object of intervention, remodelling and training, which is subject to external regulation and constraint. In "al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība", it shifts towards attempting self-regulation and self-control, though its attempts, as we may see, are largely in vain. While these images of bodily

dismemberment/dislocation appear to bear overwhelmingly negative associations,[175] it should not be forgotten that, inasmuch as the phantasy of the *corps morcelé* involves the self's contemplation of its own construction, this necessarily implies its eventual *re*construction.

Conclusion

In this final chapter we witness the most rapid transformation in the dynamic narrative self. At its outset we find a combative self, who is defiant, responsive and marked by nerve and moral strength. As the chapter progresses, the self maintains its moral stance and its sense of purpose, but is more subtly dynamic and activist, applying cautious, pragmatic strategies of resistance. By the chapter's end, however, the self has reverted to an existence resembling that of fifty years earlier, which we saw in "Jasad min Ṭīn". For, despite its earnest attempts to raise itself from its subjectified position ("I'tirāfāt"), or to defend itself bravely against a hostile, repressive other ("al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh"), the self has returned to the model of a uncohesive, underconfident self, beset by uncertainties and ontological anxieties. In particular, the once-harmonious narrative backdrop of the early independence period has regressed completely, to the point where it now evokes al-Shārūnī's earliest texts, when classes and other social groups were polarised, when daily life was marked by fear and instability, and when individuality was repressed and personal freedoms restricted.

In each of the above four texts, we find a narrative self which longs for its liberation or betterment. Cognisant of its weaknesses, it aims to set about reconstructing itself, on both the individual and group levels. Meanwhile, as the other continues to threaten and oppress it, the self is becoming more zealous and belligerent, and is prepared to defend its (perceived) honour, rights and identity. While the other still constitutes a tangible threat, it is also fighting for its life on a variety of fronts, a

[175] Indeed, in Lacanian discourse the *corps morcelé* is the central emblem of human destructiveness. Bowie, op. cit., p. 28.

combination of brute strength and cunning fuelling its determination to survive. In short, the self and the other at this stage are adversaries, their interaction marked by hostility, divisions and tensions. Self-other perceptions may be presented as follows:

SELF	OTHER
Attempts resistance	Crushes resistance
Asserts difference	Dilutes difference
Socially excluded	Socially excluding
Morally superior	Morally inferior
Human, local	God-like, remote
Nostalgia for past, aspirations for future	Focused on present, denial of past / future
Dislocated, resists polarisation	Dislocating, enforces polarisation

Conclusion

This thesis has employed the concepts of identity, self and other as critical and analytical tools for reading narrative. Through a chronological analysis of al-Shārūnī's most significant texts, produced over a period spanning slightly less than fifty years, it has focused on perceptions of the self and the other, and the dynamic manner in which both have evolved. In particular, it has attempted to demonstrate how the self and the other have transformed in line with historical, socio-political, economic and cultural change. The concepts of identity, self and other have also been employed to explore the ideological discourses underpinning al-Shārūnī's short stories, which have, in turn, evolved in the light of the changing socio-political context.

Summing Up Perceptions of the Self and the Other

As with personal, narrating selves, the narrative selves and their others in these texts have been created and re-created by the processes of history. As such, we witness the "I" pass through a series of changing stages, from being a pre-Cartesian-cum-Cartesian construct (such as Līzā in "Jasad min Ṭīn", where the self is divided along mind/soul-cum-mind/body lines), to being a fully unified, Cartesian subject (such as Sāmī in "al-Nās Maqāmāt", where the focus is on a conscious, thinking self). In later short stories, as the external reality begins to disintegrate, the self begins in turn to disintegrate (most notably in "Lamaḥāt" and "I'tirāfāt"), to the point where it evolves into a quasi-postmodernistic construct (see "al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība"). Here, emphasis is given to a fragmented, un-unified self, shaped by socially-regulated activities and practices, and where the project of the self has come to be dominated by the body.

For al-Shārūnī, individuation of the self is central, particularly in those short stories where psychological plots predominate. Thus, his narrative selves are more than mere stereotypes or caricatures, and their identities are individualised from one text to the next, as we may see from a set of examples as diverse as Sayyid Afandī 'Āmir, Fatḥī

'Abd al-Rasūl, Mawjūd 'Abd al-Mawjūd and Umm Sayyid, where each self has his/her own particular idiosyncrasies, personal habits and private memories. What is more, these are hard to fathom, flawed and often contradictory selves and, inasmuch as the short story genre permits, are frequently multi-dimensional.[1] If we were to isolate a predominant or defining self in al-Shārūnī's short stories, it would undoubtedly be the minority figure (such as the "little man", the misfit, the Copt, the woman or the bourgeois intellectual), which, despite undergoing a series of temporal re-identifications, remains relatively constant. To use Lichtenstein's term, this figure forms the basis of a "primary" narrative self, which transforms throughout the course of al-Shārūnī's body of texts. In the same way, the predominant other is, without doubt, the hegemonic other, a largely implicit construct which structures the self's subjectivity, and which is manifest in almost all settings (such as the home, the school, or the work-place), and in all of the social practices represented in these narratives.

As the mini-conclusions to each chapter have aimed to demonstrate, perceptions of and relations between the self and the other have been marked (not unremarkably) by opposition and, at times, conflict. In Chapter One, we find an under-confident, passive, and highly dependent self, excluded from society by an arrogant, bullying, destructive other. This self-other paradigm represents the realities of the late colonial period, of a society ruled by an oppressive and violent regime, and of the social and cultural transformations that came about in Egypt with and after the Second World War. Further, it represents the tensions between the imperatives of the past and the present, and between the traditional and the modern. This socio-political context also prevails in Chapter Two, although here we find a galvanised, increasingly confident self, which has flourished as a result of its dynamism and in its openness to new possibilities. The other, meanwhile, remains static, closed and rigid, clinging doggedly to the past and to its memories of former glory. This self-other paradigm represents the realities of the pre-revolutionary period, when Egyptians called for the overturning of

[1] Particularly in those texts written from the 1960s onwards.

the established social order, through the nationalist and popular democratic movements.

Chapter Three is divided between two self-other paradigms. In the first, we find an uncharacteristic merging between the self and the other, with both sides equally confident, content and optimistic. This signifies the extent to which the unifying rhetoric of nationalist ideology had been internalised by Egypt's post-revolutionary society. In the second paradigm, latent self-other tensions have begun to resurface with some force, as the other begins to slip back into its former, dominant role. This paradigm is indicative of a change in national perceptions of the revolutionary regime, particularly once political violence and oppressive practices had begun to re-appear.

Chapter Four is characterised by an "in-between" or "schizophrenic" self, cut adrift, belonging nowhere and identifying with no-one. It is a fearing and disillusioned self, crushed by the dictates of a by-now authoritarian, tyrannical other. In its socio-political context, this self-other paradigm represents a period when doubts about the efficacy of the revolution and the regime were prevalent, but were suppressed due to internal and external censorship mechanisms. By Chapter Five, the self-other paradigm appears to have almost gone full-circle, with the two halves of the binarism forming absolute polar opposites. Yet this is not the flat, "under-developed" self of earlier texts; rather, it is a complex self, with a multi-layered, fully-developed self-consciousness. This is evident from its arguments, its ironies and its contradictions: it attempts to speak out against oppression and injustice; it resists polarisation yet asserts its right to difference; and it is nostalgic for the past while pinning its hopes on a better future. This self-other paradigm of absolute division represents the severed bonds between Egypt's government and body politic, and the polarisation of its imagined national community.

What is apparent is that al-Shārūnī's *œuvre* is concerned predominantly with the individual self, its dreams and goals, and its search for self-knowledge and self-

fulfilment. In nearly all of his texts we find narrative selves who "lack", or who experience the absence of something; generally, these are desiring, aspirational selves, who strive towards self-improvement or self-betterment. In most stories (particularly those featuring a first-person narrator) we encounter selves-in-process, embarked on a restless and relentless search for a coherent sense of identity. It may be safely concluded that, with the exception of one text, "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl", no narrative self succeeds in fully realising this goal. In this isolated example, integrity is achieved by the fusion of the self with the other, to the point where all boundaries of difference or opposition are dissolved.

Representing World-Views, Ideologies and Value Systems

I have also argued in this thesis that al-Shārūnī's texts are based upon a variety of perpetually-evolving world-views, most prominent being the world-view of the Egyptian *petite bourgeoisie* to which he belongs. This takes shape in certain ideological and philosophical ideas, which he works into the themes and sometimes the structures of his short stories. In some cases, he communicates these ideas directly, through the mouths of the characters themselves (as we find in texts such as "Naẓariyya" and "Shakwā"), while in others he does this indirectly, through characters' destinies as they unfold before the reader (as in "Jasad min Ṭīn" or "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn"). In a number of instances, I have argued that certain narrative selves are personas, masking the author's own, particular world-view. As his texts reveal, this is founded on the precepts of Cartesianism/Protestant individualism, scientific rationalism and bourgeois humanism. We may deduce this from the way in which he highlights the individual self; from the way he dilutes the emphasis on ritual and superstition; from the way he gives greater emphasis to cognitive, rational understanding and learning; and from his commitment to the imperatives of the social contract. In two texts ("al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn" and "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl"), he employs a specifically Christian world-view, arguing that men should exercise humility and love

one another (as Jesus directed), albeit in the service of a nationalist ideology that applies as much to Muslims as it does to Christians.

It is nationalist ideology which is perhaps the most prominent ideology at play in these short stories, and even in later texts (where he shows the nationalist myth to have all but evaporated), al-Shārūnī never seems to lose sight of his aspirations for national unity. For, despite his insistence on individualism, he believes ultimately in the supremacy of the greater (that is, the national) good, as is apparent from texts such as "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn", "Ra'sān fi'l-Ḥalāl", "Naẓariyya" and "Shakwā". To this end, al-Shārūnī remains keen to assert the necessity of moral (i.e. ideological or religious) ties, since they bind the self-interest of the individual to the group. It is only once this group begins to crush, or oppress, the individual (as occurs in later stories, such as "al-Ziḥām", "Lamaḥāt" and "Shakwā"), that he seeks to redress the balance of power, and re-assert the principle of mutual responsibility.

Seemingly, al-Shārūnī's is a conservative and sometimes pessimistic world-view. Yet, according to the analyses presented in this thesis, it is in fact a fundamentally optimistic world-view, for, while many of his protagonists are frustrated or thwarted dreamers (such as 'Abbās al-Ḥilū, Maḥmūd in "al-Qayẓ", Sāmī and Sāmīa in "al-Nās Maqāmāt" and Ma'mūn in "al-Ḥidhā'"), al-Shārūnī promotes the humanist philosophic principle that man is central, through his efforts, to the shaping of his own history. Thus, he permits his protagonists to dream because, in his view, they are able to fulfil these dreams. In turn, he extends this philosophy to his readers, encouraging them to question the motives or unconsciousness of his characters, and in doing so to interrogate their own values and ideologies. While there is often a strongly moral undercurrent to his texts, he steers scrupulously clear of passing judgement or dogma, preferring to hint at possible resolutions to moral issues.

At every stage of his career, al-Shārūnī's short stories have called for social and moral re-organisation, their values system drawing on the thinking of Descartes, Hegel, Rousseau, Freud, Marx, Nietzche, and others. The key points to this value system may be itemised as follows (with illustrative examples of some of the stories in which they feature):

1. *The principle of the inviolability of the individual*: "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt"; "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis"; "al-Ḥidhā'"; "al-Nās Maqāmāt"; "al-Ziḥām"; "Lamaḥāt"; "Shakwā"; "I'tirāfāt", "al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība".
2. *That people have inalienable or built-in "rights", and that societies should protect these rights*: "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū"; "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt"; "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis"; "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa"; ""Risāla ilā Imra'a"; "al-Ḥidhā'"; "al-Nās Maqāmāt"; "al-Ziḥām"; "Naẓariyya"; "Lamaḥāt"; "Shakwā"; "I'tirāfāt".
3. *That blind obedience does not equal virtue*:[2] ""Jasad min Ṭīn"; "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū"; "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt"; "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis"; "al-Qayẓ"; "Risāla ilā Imra'a"; "Anīsa"; "al-Nās Maqāmāt"; "Nashrat al-Akhbār"; "Naẓariyya"; "Shakwā".
4. *That scientific investigation is good, but should be applied above all for human benefit*: "Maṣra' 'Abbās al-Ḥilū"; "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt"; "Nashrat al-Akhbār"; "Naẓariyya"; "Shakwā"; "I'tirāfāt"; "al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība".
5. *That originality, creativity and individual thought are powerful and effective; that "Creation" (be it that of God or the ruler) can no longer be seen to be complete:* "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt"; "Sariqa bi'l-Ṭābiq al-Sādis"; "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa"; ""Risāla ilā Imra'a"; "Nashrat al-Akhbār"; "Naẓariyya"; "Shakwā".
6. *That self-esteem should be promoted over pride*: "Zayṭa Ṣāni' al-'Āhāt"; "al-Nās Maqāmāt"; "Nashrat al-Akhbār"; "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn"; "Shakwā"; "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh".

[2] This applies as much to al-Shārūnī's position on religion, as to his anti-authoritarian position.

7. *That education enlightens and forms the basis for a better society*: "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa"; "Risāla ilā Imra'a"; "Naẓariyya"; "Shakwā"; "I'tirāfāt".

Al-Shārūnī's Contribution to the Modern Arabic Short Story

This thesis takes the view that al-Shārūnī is a pioneer of modernist narrative in Arabic, and has aimed to illustrate his contribution to the modern Arabic short story in particular. Notably, it has endeavoured to reveal how his use of modernist narrative modes predates that of other writers by up to twenty years.[3] Albeit somewhat limited in terms of its size, his is a diverse body of work, which has seen him pass from romanticism to realism to modernism, and even, in the final text here, to test the boundaries of postmodernism. His texts have also charted great historical change: from the cholera and post-war conditions of the late 1940s (in "al-'Ushshāq al-Khamsa" and "al-Ḥidhā'"), through the turbulent years under Nasser and Sadat ("al-Ziḥām", "Lamaḥāt" and "Shakwā"), ending with 1990s references to AIDS and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (in "al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība"). Yet, essentially, al-Shārūnī is a modernist, as we may see from the following key characteristics of his narratives:

1. His over-riding emphasis on interiority (of both the world and of time).
2. His emphasis on perspectivism (by locating meaning in the viewpoint of the individual, and by favouring narrators located within the action of the text).
3. His emphasis on impressionism (by foregrounding the processes of perception and knowing).
4. His belief in the universality of essential human values.
5. His use of techniques which take a structural approach to experience, such as psychoanalysis and myth (particularly in "al-Laḥm wa'l-Sikkīn" and "al-Umm wa'l-Waḥsh").

[3] Perhaps the most distinguished example is his short story "al-Ḥidhā'".

Another of al-Shārūnī's contributions to the short story is that, in spite of those who have argued to the contrary, he has sought consistently to engage with, to interpret and to discuss ways of changing, Egypt's socio-political reality in his texts. While his approach is generally subtle (and is, on many occasions, oblique), he has never shied from calling ideologies into question, including nationalist ideology, to which he has remained committed throughout his career. In particular, his texts reveal how the *grand narrative* of Egyptian nationalist ideology had collapsed and crumbled by as early as the mid-to-late 1950s.[4] Further, unlike many other Egyptian writers of his era, he did not eschew topics which challenged the policies of the revolutionary regime, their validity or even the extent of their success. As such, this undermines the perception of al-Shārūnī as a non-committed, introspective writer.

The stories examined here demonstrate that, for much of his career, al-Shārūnī has been a forward-thinking, *avant-garde* and even prophetic writer. Further, many of his earlier short stories still have currency, seeming to transcend the temporality of literary trends and tastes. Writing in 1993 in his introduction to *al-Majmū'āt*, al-Shārūnī explains how, some twenty years after their first publication, the reprinting of some of his earlier stories was stopped, on account of censorship problems. In the view of the censor, these stories "were critical of the current regime, and could not have been written twenty years ago".[5] As al-Shārūnī responds:

> I didn't know whether to feel happy or sad. I felt happy because my story, which I had written twenty years ago, was still alive (the censor believing it to have been written yesterday), and I felt sad because nothing had changed in our society, so that what applied twenty years ago still holds true today. But I did not overlook a third possibility, while saying somewhat conceitedly to myself: Perhaps there is something universal in this story, which transcends society at a certain stage (even though the story has its origins in it), and it is this which gives it its eternal youth.[6]

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[4] See "al-Nās Maqāmāt" (1956) and "Nashrat al-Akhbār" (1957).

[5] Yūsuf al-Shārūnī, *al-Majmū'āt*, vol. 1, p. 3.

[6] Ibid., pp. 2-3.

What this passage and al-Shārūnī's body of narratives reveal is that, from the time of the pre-revolutionary period in Egypt, the national subject has evolved and developed in a linear manner, while the hegemonic other, its systems and ideologies, have not. Rather, the hegemonic other has remained static, or has evolved — at the most — in an inwardly-spiralling fashion, to the effect that it has reverted to what it was some fifty years earlier.

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